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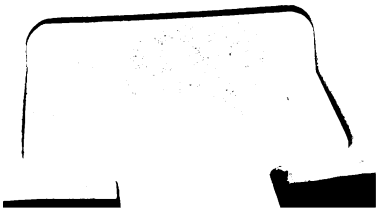

ZIK
James

Abraham

James

THE

CHRISTIAN FATHER'S PRESENT

TO

HIS CHILDREN.

8793

BY J. A. JAMES.

"And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind. For the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts; if thou seek him he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever." 1 *Chron.* xxviii. 9

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." 3 *John* 3.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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PREFACE.

As a *christian*, the author of the following volumes believes that there is a state of everlasting happiness prepared beyond the grave for those, and those only, who are partakers of pure and undefiled religion, and, as a *parent*, he will freely confess his supreme solicitude is, that his children, by a patient continuance in well doing, might seek for glory, honour, immortality; and finally possess themselves of eternal life. He is not insensible to the worth of temporal advantages; he is neither cynic nor ascetic; he appreciates the true value of wealth, learning, science, and reputation, which he desires, in such measure as God shall see fit to bestow, both for himself and his children; he has conquered the world, but does not despise it; he resists its yoke as a master, but values its ministrations as a servant. Still, however, he views the present state of sublunary affairs as a splendid pageant, the fashion of which passeth away, to give place to the glory which shall never be moved: he looketh not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. It is on this ground that he attaches *so much importance* to a religious education. *To those, if such* there should be, who ima-

ine that he is too anxious about this matter, and has said too much about it, he has simply to reply, that "he believes, therefore has he spoken." The man who does not make the religious character of his children the supreme end of all his conduct towards them, may profess to believe as a Christian, but certainly acts as an atheist: besides, if *this* end be secured, the most likely step is taken for accomplishing every other; as "Godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come."

With these views, the Author has embodied in the following volumes his own parental wishes, objects, and pursuits. Much that is here written, has been the subject of his personal converse with his children, and should God spare his life, will still continue to be the topics of his instruction.

What is beneficial to his own family, the Author thought might be no less useful to others: and this was another reason which induced him to publish. The multiplication of books of this kind, even if they make small pretensions to classic elegance of composition, is to be looked upon as a benefit, provided they contain sound scriptural sentiments and an obvious tendency to produce right moral impressions. Books are sometimes read merely because they are new; it is desirable therefore to gratify this appetite for novelty, when at the same time we can strengthen and build up the moral character by a supply of wholesome and nutritious food. Nor is it always necessary that new books should contain new topics, or new modes of illustration, any more than it is necessary that there should be a perpetual change in the kinds of food *in order to attain to* bodily strength. Whatever *varieties may be introduced* by the wisdom the

is sensual, bread will still remain the staff of life. So there are some primitive truths and subjects, which, whatever novelties and curiosities may be introduced for the gratification of religious taste, must still be repeated, as essential to the formation of religious character.

The author has not selected the sermonic form of discussion, because some of his subjects did not admit of it: and also because sermons are perhaps the least inviting species of reading to young people. Letters would not have been liable to these objections; but upon the whole, he preferred the form of chapters, in which the style of direct address is preserved. The advantage of this style is obvious; it not only keeps up the reader's interest, but, as every parent who presents these volumes to his children adopts the advice as his own, such young persons, by an easy effort of the imagination, lose sight of the Author, and read the language of their own father. If any thing is necessary to secure this effect, beyond the simple act of presenting the book, it might be immediately obtained by an inscription to the child, written by the parent's own hand upon the fly-leaf.

The Author scarcely need say that his work is not intended for young people below the age of fourteen. In the composition of the book, a seeming tautology sometimes occurs: what is just touched upon in one place, is more expanded in others: and some subjects are intentionally repeated. To give additional interest to the volumes, numerous extracts, and some anecdotes are introduced, which tend to relieve the dulness of didactic composition, and prevent the tedium of unvarying monotony.

In the references which the author has given

to books, both in the chapter on that subject, and in marginal notes, he does not wish to be considered as laying down, much less as limiting for young people, a course of reading; but as simply directing them to *some* works, which among others, ought by no means to be neglected.

Once more let it be stated, and stated with all possible emphasis, that the chief design of this work, is to form the religious character of its readers, and to implant those virtues, which shall live, and flourish, and dignify, and delight, infinite ages after every object that is dear to avarice or pride, to learning or science, to taste or ambition, shall have perished in the conflagration of the universe.

Edgbaston, April 10, 1824.

AN ADDRESS

TO

CHRISTIAN PARENTS.

My dear Friends,

It is a situation of tremendous responsibility to be a parent: for the manner in which you discharge the duties of this relation, you must give account in that awful day, when the secrets of all hearts shall be judged by Jesus Christ. With every babe that God intrusts to your care, he in effect sends the solemn injunction, "Take this child, and bring it up for me;" and at the final audit, will inquire, in what manner you have obeyed the command. It will not then be sufficient to plead the strength of your affection, nor the ceaseless efforts to which it gave rise; for if these efforts were not directed to a right end, if all your solicitude was lavished upon inferior objects, you will receive the rebuke of him that sitteth upon the throne.

It is of infinite importance that you should contemplate your children in their proper point of view. They are *animal* beings, and there-

fore it is highly proper that you should use every effort to provide them with suitable food, clothing, habitations, and every thing else that can conduce to the comfort of their present existence. They are *social* beings, and therefore it is important that you should qualify them to enjoy the comforts, and discharge the duties of social life. They are *rational* beings, and therefore it is your duty to furnish them with every possible advantage for the culture of their minds. But if you look no farther than this, you leave out of sight the grandest and most interesting lights in which they can be seen, and will of course neglect the most important of your duties towards them; for they are *immortal* beings; the stamp of eternity is upon them: everlasting ages are before them. They are like all the rest of the human race, depraved, guilty, and condemned creatures, and consequently in danger of eternal misery. Yet are they, through the mercy of God, and the mediation of Christ, creatures capable of attaining to glory, honour, immortality, and eternal life. Looking upon them in this light, and this is the light in which you profess to contemplate them, say, what should be your chief anxiety concerning them, and what your conduct towards them.

Recognising in your children, beings placed in this world in a state of probation, and hastening to eternal happiness or torment, will you be contented to seek for them any thing short of *eternal salvation*? Even a deist, who has any belief of a future state of reward and punishment, cannot act consistently, unless he is *supremely desirous* of the everlasting welfare of *his children*. None but an avowed atheist can,

with the least propriety, fix his aim lower for his children, than the possession of a happy immortality. But in the case of a *Christian parent*, it is in the highest degree inconsistent, absurd, cruel, and wicked, ever to lose sight of this even for an instant, in the arrangements which he makes for his family, or the manner of conducting himself towards them. Do you really believe in the ruin of the human race by sin, and their recovery by Christ; in the existence of such states as heaven and hell; in the necessity of a life of faith and holiness, in order to escape the one and secure the other? then act up to these solemn convictions, not only in reference to your own salvation, but to the salvation of your children. Let a supreme desire for their immortal interests be at the bottom of all your conduct, and be interwoven in all your parental habits. Let them have, in the fullest sense of the term, a *Christian education*. Act towards them, and for them, so that you shall be able to say to them, however they may turn out, "I take you to record that *I* am clear from your blood."

But my principal object in this address is, *to point out what appear to me to be the most prevailing obstacles to success, in the religious education of children.*

That in many cases the means employed by christian parents for their children's spiritual welfare are unsuccessful, is a melancholy fact, established by abundant, and, I fear, accumulating evidence. I am not now speaking of those families—and are there indeed such?—where scarcely a *semblance* of domestic piety or instruction *is to be* found, where no family altar is

seen, no family prayer is heard, no parental a monition is delivered! What! this cruel, wicke ruinous neglect of their children's immort interest in the families of *professors!!* Mo strous inconsistency! Shocking dereliction principle! No wonder that *their* children astray. This is easily accounted for. Some the most profligate young people that I kno have issued from such households. Their pr judices against religion, and their enmity again its forms, are greater than those of the childre of avowed worldlings. Inconsistent, hypocr tical, negligent professors of religion, frequentl excite in their sons and daughters an unco querable aversion and disgust against piet which seems to inspire them with a determin tion to place themselves at the farthest possib remove from its influence.

But I am now speaking of the failure of a r ligious education, where it has been, in som measure, carried on; instances of which are b no means unfrequent. Too often do we hea the echo of David's sorrowful complaint uttere by the distressed and disappointed Christia father, "Although my house be not so wit God." Too often do we see the child of man prayers and many hopes forgetting the instru tions he has received, and running with th multitude to do evil. Far be it from me to ad affliction to affliction, by saying that this is to b traced, in every case, to parental neglect. would not thus pour as it were nitre and vine gar upon the bleeding wounds, with which fili impiety has lacerated many a father's minc *I would not* thus cause the wretched parent t *exclaim,* "*Reproach* hath broken the hear

already *half* broken by my child's misconduct." I know that in many cases, no blame whatever is to be thrown on the parent; but it was the depravity of the child alone, which nothing could subdue but the power of the Holy Ghost, that led to the melancholy result. The best possible scheme of Christian education, most judiciously directed, and most perseveringly maintained, has, in some cases, totally failed. God is a sovereign, and he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy. Still, however, there is, in the order of means, a tendency in a religious education, to secure the desired result; and God usually does bless, with his saving influence, such efforts. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." This is certainly true, as a general rule, though there are many exceptions from it.

I shall now lay before you the principal obstacles to success in religious education, as they strike *my* mind.

First.—*It is frequently too negligently and capriciously maintained, even where it is not totally omitted.*

It is obvious, that if at all attended to, it should be attended to with anxious earnestness, systematic order, and perpetual regularity. It should not be taken up as a dull form, an unpleasant drudgery, but as a matter of deep and delightful interest. The heart of the parent should be entirely and obviously engaged, A part of every returning sabbath should be spent by him, surrounded by his filial charge; and it should be embodied, more or less, with the whole habit of parental *conduct*. The father may lead the *usual devotions* at the family altar: the mother

may join with him in teaching their children catechism, hymns, scripture: but if this be unattended by serious admonition, visible anxiety, and strenuous effort to lead their children to think seriously on religion, as a matter of infinite importance, little good can be expected. A cold, formal, capricious system of religious instruction is rather likely to create prejudice against religion, than prepossession in its favour.

Then, again, a religious education should be *consistent*—it should extend to *every thing* that is likely to assist in the formation of character. It should not be mere abstract tuition, but should be a complete whole. It should select the schools, the companions, the amusements, the books of youth; for if it do nothing more than merely teach a form of sound words to the understanding, and to the memory, while the impression of the heart, and the formation of the character are neglected, very little is to be expected from such efforts. A handful of seed, scattered now and then upon the ground, without order or perseverance, might as rationally be expected to produce a good crop, as a mere lukewarm, capricious, religious education to be followed by true piety. If the parent is not *visibly in earnest*, it cannot be expected that the child will be so. Religion, by every christian parent, is theoretically acknowledged to be the most important thing in the world; but if in practice the father appears a thousand times more anxious for his son to be a good scholar than a real Christian, and the mother more solicitous for the daughter to be a good dancer or musician, than *a child of* God, they may teach what they like *in the way of* good doctrine, but they are not

to look for genuine piety as the result: this can only be expected where it is really taught and inculcated, as *the one thing needful.*

Secondly—*The relaxation of domestic discipline* is another obstacle in the way of a successful religious education.

A parent is invested by God with a degree of authority over his children, which he cannot neglect to use without being guilty of trampling under foot the institutions of heaven. Every family is a community, the government of which is strictly despotic, though not tyrannical. Every father is a sovereign, though not an oppressor: he is a legislator, and not merely a counsellor: and his will is law, not merely advice. He is to command, to restrain, to punish; and children are required to obey: he is, if necessary, to threaten, to rebuke, to chastise; and they are to submit with reverence. He is to decide what books shall be read, what companions invited, what engagements formed, and how time is to be spent. If he sees any thing wrong, he is not to interpose merely with the timid, feeble, ineffectual protest of Eli, "Why do ye thus, my sons?" but with the firm, though mild prohibition. He must *rule* his own house; and by the whole of his conduct, make his children feel that obedience is his due and his demand.

The want of discipline, wherever it exists, will be supplied by confusion and domestic anarchy. Every thing goes wrong in the absence of this. A gardener may sow the choicest seeds; but if he neglect to pluck up weeds, and prune wild luxuriances; he must not expect to see his flowers grow, or his garden flourish; and so a *parent may deliver* the best instructions, but if

he do not, by discipline, eradicate evil tempers, correct bad habits, repress rank corruptions, nothing excellent can be looked for. He may be a good prophet, and a good priest, but if he be not also a good *king*, all else is vain. When once a man breaks his sceptre, or lends it to his children as a plaything, he may give up his hopes of success from a religious education.

I have seen the evil resulting from a want of discipline in innumerable families, both amongst my brethren in the ministry, and others. Frightful instances of disorder and immorality are now present to my mind, which I could almost wish to forget. The misfortune in many families is, that this regimen is unsteady and capricious, sometimes carried even to tyranny itself, at others relaxed into a total suspension of law; so that the children are at one time trembling like slaves, at others revolting like rebels; at one time groaning beneath an iron yoke, at others rioting in a state of lawless liberty. This is a most mischievous system, and its effects are generally what might be expected.

In some cases, discipline commences too late, in others it ceases too early. A father's magisterial office is coeval with his parental relation. A child as soon as he can reason, should be made to feel that obedience is due to parents; for if he grow up to boyhood before he is subject to the mild rule of paternal authority, he will, very probably, like an untamed bullock, resist the yoke. On the other hand, as long as children continue beneath the parental roof, they are to be subject to the rules of *domestic* discipline. Many parents greatly err, *in abdicating the* throne in favour of a son or

daughter, because the child is *becoming* a man or a woman. It is truly pitiable to see a boy or girl of fifteen, returning from school to sow the seeds of revolt in the domestic community, acting in opposition to parental authority, till the too compliant father gives the reins of government into filial hands, or else by his conduct declares his children to be in a state of independence. I am not advising a contest for power; for where a child has been accustomed to obey, even from an infant, the yoke of obedience will always, at least generally, be light and easy; if not, and a rebellious temper should begin to show itself early, a judicious father should be on his guard, should suffer no encroachments on his prerogative, while at the same time the increased power of his authority, like the increased pressure of the atmosphere, should be felt without being seen, and this will make it irresistible.

Thirdly, *Undue severity*, in the other extreme, is as injurious as unlimited indulgence.

If injudicious fondness has slain its tens of thousands, unnecessary harshness has destroyed its thousands. By an authority which cannot err, we are told that the cords of love are the bands of a man. There is a plastic power in love. The human mind is so constituted as to yield readily to the influence of kindness. Men are more easily led to their duty, than driven to it: a child, says an eastern proverb, may lead the elephant by a single hair. You remember, and perhaps have often seen verified, the old apologue of the Sun, the Wind, and the Traveller. *Love* seems so essential an element of the parental character, that there is

something shockingly revolting, not only in a cruel, not only in an unkind, not only in a severe, but even in a cold-hearted father. Study the parental character as it is exhibited in that most exquisitely touching moral picture, the parable of the Prodigal Son. When a father governs entirely by cold, bare, uncovered authority; by mere commands, prohibitions and threats; by frowns untempered with smiles; when the friend is never blended with the legislator, nor authority modified with love; when his conduct produces only a servile fear in the hearts of his children, instead of a generous affection; when he is served from a dread of the effects of disobedience, rather than from a sense of the pleasure of obedience; when he is dreaded in the family circle as a frowning spectre, rather than hailed as the guardian angel of its joys; when even accidents raise a storm, and faults a hurricane of passion in his bosom; when offenders are driven to equivocation and lying, with the hope of averting by concealment those severe corrections which disclosure always entails; when unnecessary interruptions are made to innocent enjoyments; when, in fact, nothing of the father, but every thing of the tyrant, is seen; can we expect religion to grow in such soil as this? Yes, as rationally as we may look for the tenderest hothouse plant to thrive amidst the rigours of eternal frost.

It is useless for such a father to teach religion; he chills the soul of his pupils; he hardens their hearts against impression; he prepares them to rush with eager haste to their ruin, as soon as they have thrown off the yoke

of their bondage; and to employ their liberty, as affording the means of unbridled gratification. Like a company of African slaves, they are first tortured by their thraldom, and by that very bondage, trained up to convert their emancipation into a means of destruction.

Let parents then, in all their conduct, blend the lawgiver and the friend, temper authority with kindness, and realize in their measure that representation of Deity which Dr. Watts has given us, where he says,

> "Sweet majesty and awful love,
> Sit smiling on his brow."

In short, let them so act, that their children shall be convinced that their law is holy, and their commandment is holy and just and good; and that to be so governed, is to be blessed.

Fourthly.—*The inconsistent conduct of parents* themselves, is a frequent and powerful obstacle to success in religious education.

Example has been affirmed to be omnipotent, and its power, like that of gravitation, is always in proportion to the nearness of the attracting body; what then must be the influence of *parental* example? Now as I am speaking of *religious* parents, it is of course assumed that they do exhibit, in some measure, the reality of religion: but may not the reality often be seen where much of the beauty of true godliness is obscured, just as the sun is beheld when his effulgence is quenched in a mist; or as a lovely prospect is seen through a haze, which, though it leave its extent uncovered, veils all its beauty. Religion may be seen in dim outline by the children in their parents' conduct, *but it is attended* with so many minor inconsist-

encies, such a mist of imperfections, that it presents little to conciliate their regard or raise their esteem. There is so much worldly-mindedness, so much conformity to fashionable follies, so much irregularity of domestic piety, such frequent sallies of unchristian temper, such inconsolable grief and querulous complaint under the trials of life, such frequent animosities towards their fellow christians, observable in the conduct of their parents, that they see religion to the greatest possible disadvantage, and the consequence is, that it either lowers their standard of piety, or inspires a disgust toward it altogether. Parents, as you would wish your instructions and admonitions to your children to be successful, enforce them by the power of a holy example. It is not enough for you to be pious on the whole, but you should be wholly pious; not only to be real disciples, but eminent ones; not only sincere christians, but consistent ones. Your standard of religion should be very high. To some parents I would give this advice, "*Say* less about religion to your children, or else manifest more of its influence. Leave off family prayer, or else leave off family sins." Beware how you act, for all your actions are seen at home. Never talk of religion but with reverence: be not forward to speak of the faults of your fellow christians, and when the subject is introduced, let it be in a spirit of charity towards the offender, and of decided abhorrence of the fault. Many parents have done irreparable injury to their children's minds by a proneness to find out, talk of, and *almost rejoice over* the inconsistencies of professing *christians*. Never cavil at or find fault

with the religious exercises of the minister you attend: but rather commend his discourses, in order that your children might listen to them with greater attention. Direct their views to the most eminent Christians, and point out to them the loveliness of exemplary piety. In short, seeing that your example may be expected so much to aid or frustrate your efforts for the conversion of your children, consider "what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness."

Fifthly.—Another obstacle to the success of religious intruction, is sometimes found *in the wild conduct of an elder branch of the family, especially in the case of a dissipated son.*

The elder branches of a family are found, in general, to have considerable influence over the rest, and oftentimes to give the tone of morals to the others: they are looked up to by their younger brothers and sisters; they bring companions, books, amusements into the house; and thus form the character of their juniors. It is of great consequence, therefore, that parents should pay particular attention to their elder children; and if unhappily their habits should be decidedly unfriendly to the religious improvement of the rest, they should be removed if possible, from the family. One profligate son may lead all his brothers astray. I have seen this, in some cases, most painfully verified. A parent may feel unwilling to send from home an unpromising child, under the apprehension that he will grow worse and worse; but kindness to him in this way, is cruelty to the others. Wickedness is contagious, especially *when the diseased* person is a brother.

Sixthly.—*Bad companions* out of the house, counteract all the influence of religious instruction delivered at home.

A christian parent should ever be on the alert to watch the associations which his children are inclined to form. On this subject, I have said much to the young themselves in the following work: but it is a subject which equally concerns the parent. One ill chosen friend of your children's may undo all the good you are the means of doing at home. It is impossible for you to be sufficiently vigilant on this point. From their very infancy, encourage them to look up to you as the selectors of their companions; impress them with the necessity of this, and produce a habit of consulting you at all times. Never encourage an association which is not likely to have a decidedly friendly influence on their religious character. This caution was never more necessary than in the present age. Young people are brought very much together by the religious institutions which are now formed, and although there is a great probability that in such a circle suitable companions will be found, yet it is too much even for charity to believe, that all the active young friends of Sunday Schools, Juvenile Missionary Societies, &c. &c. are fit companions for our sons and our daughters. Encourage them to consider *you* their chief friends; and so act towards them that they shall want no other. On this subject you will find a few remarks, in a note, in the following work.

Seventhly.—*The schisms which sometimes arise in our churches, and embitter the minds of chris-*

tians against each other, have a very unfriendly influence upon the minds of the young.

They see so much that is opposite to the spirit and genius of christianity in both parties, and enter so deeply into the views and feelings of one of them, that their attention is drawn off from the essentials of religion, or their prejudices raised against them. I look upon this to be one of the most painful and mischievous consequences of ecclesiastical contentions.

Eighthly.—*The neglect of young persons by our churches and their pastors*, is another impediment to the success of domestic religious instruction.

This, however, does not so much appertain to parents in their separate capacity, as in their relation as members of a christian society, and even in this relation it belongs less to them than to their pastors. There is a blank yet to be filled up in reference to the treatment of the young, who are not in church communion. As a Dissenter, I object of course to the rite of Confirmation as practised in the established church: but we want something, I will not say like it, but in lieu of it. We want something that shall recognise the young, interest them, attract them, guard them.*

Ninthly.—*The spirit of filial independence*, which is sanctioned by the habits, if not by the opinions of the age, is another hindrance, and the last which I shall mention, to the good effect contemplated and desired by a religious education.

The disposition, which is but too apparent in this age, to enlarge the privileges of the chil-

* See an excellent sermon by the Rev. J. Bennett, entitled "The duties of the Churches towards the Rising Generation."

dren by diminishing the prerogative of their parents, is neither for the comfort of the latter, nor for the wellbeing of the former. Rebellion against a justly constituted authority can never be in any case a blessing, and all-wise parents, together with all-wise youth, will unite in supporting that just parental authority, which however the precocious manhood of some might feel to be an oppression, the more natural and slowly approaching maturity of others, will acknowledge to be a blessing. Children who find the parental yoke a burden, are not very likely to look upon that of Christ as a benefit.*

Such, my dear friends, as they appear to my mind, are the principal obstacles to the success of those efforts which are carried on by many for the religious education of their children. Seriously consider them: and having looked at them endeavour to avoid them. Survey them as the mariner does the flame of the light-house, for the purpose of avoiding the rock on which it is placed. Recognise your children, as every Christian parent should do, not only as animal, rational, social beings, but as immortal creatures, lost sinners, beings invited to eternal life through the mediation of Christ; and while you neglect not any one means that can promote their comfort, reputation, and usefulness in this world, concentrate your chief solicitude, and employ your noblest energies in a scriptural, judicious, persevering scheme of *religious* education.—"Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in *the nurture* and admonition of the Lord."

* *There is a very useful sermon of Dr. Winter's on the subject of this address.*

THE

CHRISTIAN FATHER'S PRESENT

TO HIS CHILDREN.

CHAPTER I.

On the anxiety of a Christian parent for the spiritual welfare of his children.

MY DEAR CHILDREN,

NEVER did I pass a more truly solemn or interesting moment, than that in which my first-born child was put into my arms, and I felt that I was a father. A new solicitude was then produced in my bosom, which every succeeding day has tended to confirm and strengthen. I looked up to heaven, and breathed over my babe the petition of Abraham for his son, "O that Ishmael might live before thee." Recognising, in the little helpless being which had been so lately introduced into our world, a creature born for eternity, and who, when the sun was extinguished, would be still soaring in heaven, or sinking in hell, I retired to the closet of private devotion, and solemnly dedicated the child to that God, who had given me the precious boon; and earnestly prayed, that whatever might be his lot in this world, he might be a partaker of true piety, and numbered with the saints in glory everlasting.

During the *days* of your infancy I watched *you, together with* your sainted mother, with

all the fondness of a parent's heart. We have smiled upon you when you were slumbering in healthful repose; we have wept over you when tossed with feverish restlessness and pain; we have been the delighted spectators of your childish sports; we have witnessed with pleasure the developement of your intellectual powers; and have often listened with somewhat of pride, to the commendations bestowed upon your persons and attainments;—but, amidst all, one deep solicitude took hold on our minds, which nothing could either divert or abate, and that is, *a deep anxiety for your spiritual welfare, —for your religious character.*

You cannot doubt, my children, that your parents love you. We have, in all your recollections, a witness to this. We have, as you know, done every thing to promote your welfare, and, so far as was compatible with this object, your pleasure also. We have never denied you a gratification which our duty and ability allowed us to impart; and if at any time we have been severe in reproof, even *this* was a more awful form of love. We have spared no expense in your education; in short, love, an intense love, of which you can at present form no adequate conception, has been the secret spring of all our conduct towards you; and as the strongest proof, and purest effort of our affection, we wish you to be partakers of true piety. Did we not cherish this anxiety, we shoul feel that, amidst every other expression of regard, we were acting towards you a most cruel and unnatural part. Genuine love desires *and seeks* for the objects on which it is fixed, *the greatest benefits* of which they are capable;

and as you have a capacity to serve, and enjoy, and glorify God by real religion, how can we love you in reality, if we do not covet for you this high and holy distinction? We should feel that our love had exhausted itself upon trifles, and had let go objects of immense, infinite, eternal consequence, if it were not to concentrate all its prayers, desires, and efforts, in your personal religion.

Almost every parent has some one object which he desires above all others on behalf of his children. Some are anxious that their offspring may shine as warriors; others, that their's may be surrounded with the milder radiance of literary, scientific, or commercial fame. *Our* supreme ambition for you is, that whatever situation you occupy, you may adorn it with the beauties of holiness, and discharge its duties under the influence of Christian principle. Much as we desire your respectability in life, and we will not conceal our hope that you will occupy no mean place in society, yet we would rather see you in the most obscure, and even menial situation, provided you were partakers of true piety, than see you on the loftiest pinnacle of the temple of fame, the objects of universal admiration, if at the same time your hearts were destitute of the fear of God. We might, indeed, in the latter case, be tempted to watch your ascending progress, and hear the plaudits with which your elevation was followed, with something of a parent's vanity; but when we retired from the dazzling scene to the seat of serious reflection, the spell would be instantly broken, and we should sorrowfully exclaim, "Alas! my son, what is all

this, in the absence of religion, but soaring high to have the greater fall!"

You must be aware, my dear children, that all our conduct towards you, has been conducted upon these principles. Before you were capable of receiving instruction, we presented ceaseless prayer to God for your personal piety. As soon as reason dawned, we poured the light of religious instruction upon your mind, by the aid of familiar poetry, catechisms, and conversation. You cannot remember the time when these efforts commenced. How often have you retired with us, to become the subjects of our earnest supplications at the throne of grace. You have been the witnesses of our agony for your eternal welfare. Have we not instructed, warned, admonished, encouraged you, as we laid open to your view, the narrow path which leadeth to eternal life? Have we not been guided by this object in the selection of schools for you education, companions for your amusement, books for your perusal? Has not this been so interwoven with all our conduct, that if at any time you had been asked the question, "What is the chief object of your parents' solicitude on your account," you must have said at once "For my being truly pious?" Yes, my children, this is most strictly true. At home, abroad, in sickness and in health, in prosperity and in adversity, this is the ruling solicitude of our bosoms.

How intently have we marked the developement of your character, to see if our fondest wishes were likely to be gratified. We have observed your deportment under the sound of *the Gospel*, and when you have appeared listless *and uninterested*, it has been as wormwood in

our cup; while, on the other hand, when we have seen you, listening with attention, quietly wiping away the tear of emotion, or retiring pensive and serious to your closet, we have rejoiced more than they which find great spoil. When we have looked on the conduct of any pious youth, we have uttered the wish, "O that my child were like him!" and have directed your attention to his character, as that which we wished you to make the model of your's. When, on the other hand, we have witnessed the behaviour of some prodigal son, who has been the grief of his parents, the thought has been like a dagger to our heart, "What if my child should turn out thus!"

1. Now we cherish all this solicitude on *our own account.* We candidly assure you, that nothing short of this will make us happy. Your piety is the only thing that will make us rejoice that we are parents. How can we endure to see our children choosing any other ways than those of wisdom, and any other path than that of life? How could we bear the sight, to behold you travelling along the broad road which leadeth to destruction, and running with the multitude to do evil? "O God, hide us from this sad spectacle, in the grave, and ere that time comes, take us to our rest." But how would it embitter our last moments, and plant our dying pillow with thorns, to leave you on earth in an unconverted state; following us to the grave, but not to heaven. Or should you be called to die before us, and take possession of the tomb in our names, how could we stand at the dreadful post of observation, darker every hour, *without one* ray of hope for you, to cheer our

wretched spirits! How could we sustain the dreadful thought, which in spite of ourselves would sometimes steal across the bosom, that the very next moment after you had passed beyond our kind attentions, you would be received to the torments which know neither end nor mitigation! And when you had departed under such circumstances, what could heal our wounds, or dry our tears!

Should you become truly pious, this circumstance will impart to our bosoms a felicity which no language could enable me to describe. It will sweeten all our intercourse with you, establish our confidence, allay our fears, awaken our hopes. If we are prosperous, it will delight us to think that we are not acquiring riches for those who will squander it on their lusts, but who will employ it for the glory of God when we are in the dust. Or, if we are poor, it will cheer us to reflect, that though we cannot leave you the riches of this world, we see you in possession of the favour of God, and that portion, which after comforting you on earth, will enrich you through eternity. My dear children, if you are anxious to comfort the hearts of your parents, if ye would fulfil our joy; if ye would repay all our labour, anxiety, affection; if ye would most effectually discharge all the obligations which you cannot deny you owe us, *Fear God, and choose the ways of religion:* this, this only, will make us happy.

2. We cherish this solicitude on behalf of the *church*, and the cause of God.

We are every year conveying to the tombs *of their fathers*, some valued and valuable mem*bers of the* Christian church. We are perpe-

tually called to witness the desolations of the last enemy in the garden of the Lord. How often do we exclaim over the corpse of some eminent Christian and benefactor,—"Departed saint, how heavy the loss we have sustained by thy removal to a better state! Who now shall fill up thy vacant seat, and bless like thee both the church and the world?" My children, under these bereavements, to whom should we look but to you? To whom should we turn but to the *children* of the kingdom, for *subjects* of the kingdom? You are the property of the church. It has a claim upon you. Will ye not own it, and discharge it? Must we see the walls of the spiritual house mouldering away, and you, the rightful materials with which it should be repaired, withheld? We love the church, we long for its prosperity, we pray for its increase, and it cannot but be deeply distressing to us to witness the ravages of death, and, at the same time, to see the want of religion in those young persons, whose parents, during their life, filled places of honour and usefulness in the fellowship of the faithful.

We are anxious for your being pious that you might be the instruments of blessing the *world* by the propagation of religion. The moral condition of the world is too bad for description. If it be ever improved, this must be done by Christians. True piety is the only reformer of mankind. A spirit of active benevolence has happily risen up, rich in purposes and means, for the benefit of the human race. But the men, in whose bosoms it now lives and moves, are not immortal upon earth; they too must *sleep in dust*, and who shall succeed them

at their post and enter into their labours? Who will catch their falling mantle, and carry on their glorious undertaking for the salvation of millions? If it be ever done, it must be done of course by those who are now rising into life. The propagation of religion to the next generation, and to distant nations, depends on you, and others of your age. While I write, the groans of creation are ascending; and future ages are rising up to plead with you, that you would bow to the influence of religion, as the only way of extending it to them.

3. But we are chiefly anxious, after all, on *your* account.

My children, the anxiety which we feel on this head, is far too intense for language. Here I may truly say, "poor is thought, and poor expression." If piety were to be obtained for you only by purchase, and I were rich in the possession of worlds, I would beggar myself to the last farthing to render you a Christian, and think the purchase cheap. "Godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come." As I shall have more than one chapter on the advantages of piety, it will not be necessary to enlarge upon them here, any further than to say, that true godliness will save you from much present danger and inconvenience, promote your temporal interests, prepare you for the darkest scenes of adversity, comfort you on a dying bed, and finally conduct you to everlasting glory. The want of it will ensure the reverse of all this. Sooner or later such a destitution *will bring misery* on earth, and be followed *with eternal torments* in hell.

What then, my children, are all worldly acquirements and possessions without piety? What are the accomplishments of taste, the elegancies of wealth, the wreaths of fame, but as the fragrant and many-coloured garland which adorns the miserable victim about to be sacrificed at the shrine of this world? Original genius, a vigorous understanding, a well stored mind, and all this adorned by the most amiable temper, and most insinuating address, will neither comfort under the trials of life, nor save their lovely possessor from the worm that never dies, and the fire that is never quenched. Oh! no; they may qualify for earth, but not for heaven. Alas, alas! that such estimable qualities should all perish for want of that piety, which alone can give immortality and perfection to the excellencies of the human character!

Can you wonder then at the solicitude we feel for your personal religion, when such interests are involved in this momentous concern?

CHAPTER II.

On the dispositions with which we should enter upon an inquiry into the nature of Religion.

Religion is a subject of a spiritual and moral nature, and therefore requires another and a different frame of mind to that which we carry to a topic, purely intellectual.

1. The first disposition essentially necessary, *is a deep seriousness.*

Religion is the very last thing in the universe with which we should allow ourselves to trifle. Nothing can be more shocking and incongruous than that flippancy and inconsiderateness, with which some people treat this dread theme. When Uzzah put forth his hand *in haste* to support the ark, his life paid the forfeit of his temerity; and if the man, who takes up his bible to inquire into the meaning of its contents, with a frivolous and volatile temper, do not suffer the same penalty, it is not because the action is less criminal or less dangerous, but because God has now removed the punishment a little farther distant from the sin. I cannot conceive of any thing more likely to provoke God to give a person up to the bewildering influence of his own inherent depravity, and consequently to a confused and erroneous perception of religious truth than this temper. To see a person approaching the Oracle of God with the same levity as a votary of fashion and folly enters a place of amusement, is indeed revolting to taste, to say nothing of more sacred feelings. Religion enthroned behind the veil in the temple of truth, and dwelling amidst the brightness which the merely curious eye cannot bear to look upon, refuses to unfold her glories, or discover her secrets, to the volatile mind; and delivers to every one who draws near to her abode, the admonition of Jehovah to Moses, "Put off thy shoes, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

The subjects treated of by religion, are of the most awfully important nature. Every thing about it is serious. The eternal God, in *every view of his* nature and operations—the

Lord Jesus Christ in his sufferings and death—the soul of man, in its ruin and salvation—the solemnities of judgement—the mysteries of eternity—the felicities of heaven—the torments of hell, are all involved in the mighty comprehension of religion. Should *such* themes be ever touched with irreverence? My dear children, I warn you against the too common practice of reducing to the level of mere intellectual theories, and of treating with the same indifference as the systems of philosophy, that sacred volume, which, to use the words of Locke, "has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture of error, for its contents." Do not forget, then, that the very first requisite, not only in religion itself, but also in that frame of mind, which enables us to understand its nature, is *seriousness*.

2. *A great solicitude to be guided aright*, is the next disposition, and nearly allied to the former.

Eternal consequences hang upon this question. As we mistake it, or understand it, we shall travel onward to heaven or hell. An inquiry of such importance should, of course, be urged with the deepest anxiety. It might be rationally expected, that events so awfully tremendous as death and judgement; a subject so deeply interesting as whether we shall spend eternal ages, in torments or in bliss, could in no possible case, and in no constitution of mind whatever, fail of exciting the most serious apprehension and concern. And yet there are multitudes, who have talked a thousand times about religion, but yet have never had in all *their lives one hour's real solicitude* to know

whether their views of its nature are correct. Is it to be wondered then, that so many remain in ignorance, or plunge into error?

3. *Docility*, or a teachable dispcsition, is of great consequence.

Our Lo.. laid great emphasis on this, when he said, "Except ye be converted, and *become as little children*, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Children, when they first go to school, have a sense of their own ignorance; they have neither prepossessions nor prejudices; they present their unfurnished minds to their teachers to receive, with implicit confidence, all that they are taught. Docility is essential to improvemont in every thing; for if a child go to school puffed up with high notions of his own attainments, imagining that he knows as much as his master can teach him, and with a disposition to cavil at every thing that is communicated; in this case, improvement is out of the question; the avenues of knowledge are closed. In nothing is docility more necessary than in religion, where the subject is altogether beyond the cognizance of the senses, and the discoveries of reason. Christianity is purely and exclusively matter of revelation. Of course, all our knowledge on this topic must be derived from the Bible; to the right understanding of which, we must carry the same consciousness of our ignorance, the same destitution of prejudice and prepossession, the same implicit submission of the understanding, as the child on his first going to school does to his instructor. We must go to the word of God with these convictions in our mind, "This is the master, from whom I, *who know nothing*, am most implicitly to re-

ceive all things. My teacher is infallible, and I am not to cavil at his instructions, however in some things they may transcend my ability to comprehend them."

Yes, the bible, the bible alone, is the infallible teacher in religious matters, from whose authority there does and can lie no appeal; before whose solemn dicta, reason must bow in humble silence, to learn and to obey. This is docility, by which I mean, not a supple disposition to believe what others believe, or to adopt the creed which they would impose upon us; no, this is surrendering our understanding to be enslaved by human authority: but teachableness, means going direct to the master, with this determination, whatever he teaches I will believe, be it so sublime, so humiliating, so novel, and, to my present limited capacities, so incomprehensible as it may.

Are we, then, to exclude reason from the business of religion? By no means. It would be as absurd to attempt it, as it would be impossible to accomplish it. The whole affair of piety is a process of reason; but then it is reason submitting itself to the guidance of revelation. Reason bears the same relation to religion, and performs the same office, as it does in the system of jurisprudence; it examines the evidence, by which a law is proved to be an enactment of the legislature; interprets according to the known use of terms and phrases, its right meaning, and then submits to its authority. Thus, in matters of religion, its province is to examine the evidences by which the bible is proved to be a revelation from God; having done *this, it is* to ascertain, according to the

fixed use of language, its true meaning; and then to submit to its authority, by believing whatever it reveals, and obeying whatever it enjoins. This is what we mean by prostrating our reason before the tribunal of revelation, than which surely nothing can more accord with the design of the bible, or the ignorance of the human mind.

But, suppose reason should meet with palpable contradictions in the word of God, is she to believe them? This is putting a case which cannot happen, since it is supposing that God will give his sanction to a lie. There can be no contradictions in the word of God; the thing is impossible. But still it will be replied, Is not one kind of evidence for the divine authority of revelation, derived from its contents? and if so, may not reason, make the nature of a doctrine a test of its truth? At best this is but a secondary species of evidence, and cannot oppose the primary kind of proof. If it cannot be proved that a doctrine is really an interpolation, and there is at the same time all the evidence that the case admits of, that it is a part of divine revelation, no difficulty in the way of understanding its meaning, no seeming mystery in its terms, should lead us to reject it; we must receive it and wait for further light to understand it.

Revelation is the sun, reason the eye which receives its beams, and applies them to all the purposes of life, for which, in ceaseless succession they flow in upon us: and it can no more be said that revelation destroys or degrades *reason*, by guiding it, than it can be said the

solar orb extinguishes the power of vision, by directing its efforts.

Docility then, my dear children, by which I mean a submission of the human understanding, in matters of religion, to the word of God, is essential to all true piety. I insist upon this with more earnestness, because it is easy to perceive, that the tendency of the present age is in an opposite direction. A haughty and flippant spirit has arisen, which, under the pretext of freedom of inquiry, has discovered a restless propensity to throw off the authority of divine truth; a spirit more disposed to teach the bible than to be taught by it; to speculate upon what it should be, than to receive it as it is; a spirit which would receive the morality of the word of God as it finds it, but which is perpetually employed in mending its theology; which, in fact, would subvert the true order of things, and, instead of subjecting reason to revelation, would make reason the teacher, and revelation the pupil. Beware, my children, of this dangerous spirit, which, while it pays flattering compliments to your understanding, is injecting the deadliest poison into your soul.

4. *A prayerful spirit* is essential to a right disposition for inquiring into the nature of true piety.

Religion is an affair so spiritual in its nature, so tremendously important in its consequences, and so frequently misunderstood; and, on the other hand, we ourselves are so liable to be misled in our judgements by the bewildering influence of internal depravity, and external temptation, that it betrays the most criminal *indifference*, or the most absurd self-confidence,

to enter on this subject, without constant earnest supplication for direction to the Father and Fountain of lights.

The religious world is like an immense forest, through which lies the right road to truth and happiness; but besides this, there are innumerable paths running in all directions; every way has its travellers, each traveller thinks he is right, and attempts to prove it, by referring to the map which he carries in his hand. In such circumstances, who, that values his soul or her eternal situation, would not seek for guidance to him who has promised to disclose to us by his Spirit the path of life? When young people trust to the efforts of their own unaided reason, and neglect to ask for the guiding influence of the eternal God, it is matter of little surprise that they are found walking in the paths of error. There is a degree of pride and independence in this, which God often punishes, by leaving them to the seductions of sophistry and falsehood. In addition, then, to the greatest seriousness of mind, and the most intense desire after truth, and the most unprejudiced approach to the oracle of scripture, pray constantly to God to reveal to you the nature of true piety, and to dispose you to embrace it. This is the way appointed by God to obtain it. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto them which are your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him." "I will instruct thee, and teach

thee in the way thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eye."

These, surely, with a thousand other passages of similar import, are sufficient to enjoin and encourage the temper I now recommend. I have no hope of those who neglect habitual prayer for divine illumination. I expect to see them left to embrace error for truth, or to content themselves with the mere forms of godliness, instead of its power.

CHAPTER III.

On right sentiments in Religion.

Truth and error, my children, are essentially distinct, and diametrically opposed to each other. It is important to perceive in every case this difference to embrace the one, and reject the other. To have the judgement misled in its decisions, on any subject, is an evil, which, as rational creatures, we should ever deprecate; but to be mistaken on that subject, where "he that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned," is most fearful, most fatal. To be in error on the topics of literature, science, commerce, history, is a mere inconvenience, at worst a derogation from our mental reputation, or our worldly comfort; but to be fundamentally wrong in religion, is an evil which commences its chief mischief from the day of our death, and perpetuates itself through *all the ages of* eternity.

I need not inform you, that there prevails an endless variety of opinion on the subject of religion. This circumstance, however, with pious minds, it might be a matter of regret, with philophic ones, is no cause of surprise. Infidels, who profess to study theology in the book of nature, are divided into many sects. Scarcely a subject exists, however plain, and apparently incapable of producing a diversity of opinion, but what is viewed by different men in various lights. What clashing opinions exist among lawyers, concerning the precise meaning of the words of a statute, which was drawn up with the most anxious care to avoid all litigation. That different opinions should exist on the meaning of the Scriptures, is less to be wondered at, when we consider how deeply we are all interested in the matter of revelation, and how apt we are in cases of personal interest, to have our judgements biassed by our feelings. The Bible, if read in heaven by holy angels and spirits made perfect, produces no discordant opinions there. It is to the depravity of human nature, that all religious error is to be traced.

Diversity of sentiment, although confessedly an evil, has been productive of some benefits. It has afforded opportunity for the more vigorous exercise and conspicuous display of Christian charity and forbearance between the various sects; while it is a constant pledge for the purity of the sacred text. As they all profess to draw their opinions from the Bible, they of course maintain a constant and sleepless jealousy over each other's treatment of the word of God. *Their opposition* to each other converts them *all into vigilant* guardians of the source of their *faith; so that* although they have corrupted the

streams of truth, they have jointly guarded the purity of the *fountain.* The suspicion of any liberties having been taken with the word of God, would be an evil more to be deplored than the existence of a diversity of opinion on the sacred text. While the genuineness of the statute is admitted, and the incorruptibility of the judge is maintained, the wranglings of counsellors cannot subvert the foundations of justice.

Still, however, these opposite sentiments cannot of course be *all* right. Although error is multiform, truth is uniform; and it is of infinite consequence, that we should embrace the one and reject the other.

1. Some errors unquestionably exclude a man from salvation. "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." Now certainly from this language it is evident that salvation is suspended on a belief of the gospel, and of course upon a belief of the true gospel, not on the belief of a false one. If, therefore, what we believe is not the same as that which the word of God reveals, it is not the Gospel; and such a faith will not save us. To ascertain with precision what truths are essential to the hope of eternal life, is a very difficult task: to say how far a person may go in error, and yet after all be saved, is what no mortal should presume to do. When a man, however, disbelieves the Bible to be the word of God; or rejects the doctrine of the atonement; or the justification of the soul by faith; or the necessity of divine influences to renew and sanctify the heart, or the obligation of true holiness; I do not see how such an individual *can be saved.* He subverts the very foundations

of the Gospel. *Something* must be believed, as our Lord himself tells us, in order to the possession of everlasting happiness; and if *these* things may be disbelieved, and yet a sinner be saved, it is difficult to find out what there is left for him to believe. If some sentiments, then, are essential to a saving faith, we should be most tremblingly afraid of error; and as it is not for us to say how far an individual may go in error in order to be excluded from the blessings of the Gospel we should certainly be alarmed at the least deviation from the truth, as there is no doubt that one wrong notion prepares the mind for the reception of another. This leads me to observe,

2. That all error has a tendency to pollute the mind; to the degree in which it exists, and therefore must be so far sinful.

"Sanctify them by thy truth," said our Lord, "thy word is truth." Now if truth sanctifies, error must corrupt the mind; except two causes so diametrically opposite to each other, as these are, can be supposed to produce the same effects; which is absurd. Whatever is not truth must be error. Whatever opinion we profess to have received from the word of God, must be classed under one or the other of these heads, and must have some influence or other upon our religious character, as it appears in the sight of God. Wrong sentiments may not produce immorality in the life, but if they corrupt our secret motives; if they render us spiritually proud, and lead us to glory before God; if they make us self-confident and self-dependent; if they cause us to lean to our own understanding; *if they lead* us to look with contempt upon

others; if they keep us from using any means of grace instituted by God, they pollute and injure the mind in the sight of its Omniscient Creator. The least disease in the body, although it be unobserved by others, or yet unfelt by the subject of it, is an injury to the health. It may never come to a fatal attack, or bring on death, but still it is injurious to the frame and it is precisely thus with error in the mind.

All religion is founded upon opinion. It begins with the reception of truth into the understanding: if therefore the whole truth *is not* received, some part of the moral means appointed for our spiritual improvement is not applied; and if any thing contrary to the truth *is* received, a cause is in operation upon our minds, opposite to the right one. The order of piety is the order of nature: first, we receive an opinion, then our feelings are excited by the opinion, and then the will resolves to act under the influence of the feelings; as is the opinion, such are the feelings; and as are the feelings, such are the resolutions and the actions. If the opinion, therefore, is wrong, all that follows must be wrong, as to its moral character in the sight of God.

I am aware that a difficulty presents itself here to many young persons, which does not a little perplex them. They see individuals who have embraced the widest extremes of opinion, equally exemplary for the discharge of all the relative and social obligations. They see those who have embraced error, as useful, peaceful, ornamental members of society as those who have received the truth. This is undoubtedly a *fact. I know* very many who have rejected

almost all that is peculiar to Christianity, who are yet amongst the most truly respectable inhabitants of the places in which they live. But this does not disprove my statements, nor in any degree prove that error is innocent and harmless. There are two lights in which the human character is to be viewed; its aspect towards men, and that which it bears towards God. Now I do not mean to say that religious error may in any material, or visible degree, alter the former. A man may be a good subject, neighbour, husband, father, tradesman, master, with *any* or with *no* religious opinions at all. Many infidels have been exemplary in their attention to all the duties of social life. This, however, only proves that error does not always disfigure the character in the sight of man; but we are now more particularly speaking of its aspect towards God. In this view of it there may be a degree of obliquity truly awful, while all is correct towards man. Pride of intellect and of heart; self-sufficiency and self-dependence; a stout and pertinacious resistance to Jehovah's authority; a peremptory refusal to submit to his schemes and will, may all be rife in the soul, while every thing is fair in the exterior. God looketh to the heart; and in his eye the character is decided by the state of the mind. Religion, properly speaking, has to do with God and heaven: it is a right disposition towards God and a spiritual preparation for the celestial state, which, as is perfectly evident, may be wanting, where there are the most splendid social virtues. What I affirm then is, that error, according to the degree in which it exists, must vitiate the character, and deprave the heart in the sight of

God; must obstruct the growth and exercise of the religious principle: must unfit a person for divine fellowship here, and for eternal glory hereafter.

Error on religious subjects is not a mere intellectual defect; it is not the result of mere weakness of understanding; its seat is in the heart: it springs from carelessness, prejudice, pride, or some other operation of our depravity, which exerts a bewildering influence on the judgement. We are as certainly accountable to God for it as for evil conduct. It is not to be conceived for a moment, that we are responsible for the exercises of every faculty of the soul, yet not for the understanding, which is the noblest of them all. If a man may *believe* error and yet be innocent, he may *preach* it without guilt; and if this be the case he may employ all his faculties, his talents, his time, his influence, in a direct opposition to the counsels of heaven, and all the revelations of God, and yet be without blame.

If these things are correct, then error is certainly criminal. How can there be a doubt of this? If a man may disbelieve a less important truth, and yet be innocent in that act of his disbelief; then he may reject a more important one, and be equally faultless. If he may discredit one truth, without guilt, then he may discredit two; if two, ten; if ten, half the bible; if half the bible, the whole; and yet be innocent, even though he be a deist or atheist, provided he be not immoral, and profess at the same time to be inquiring after truth. And then why is it said to all the world, "He that believeth not shall be damned?" And what saith the scrip-

ture in other places? "For this cause God shall send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth." "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so I say now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." "Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God." "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed! for he that biddeth him God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds." "Henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines, for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace." "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts, shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." "There were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that brought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction; and many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of; whose judgement now of a

long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not."*

These and many more similar texts decide the point, that errors are blameable and destructive; that they spring from the depravity of our nature, and demonstrate a heart, in so far as they prevail, not yet brought into subjection to Christ.

Beware then, my dear children, of that spurious candour, which looks with an equal eye on all opinions; which talks of the innocence of error, and thus diffuses a baleful indifference to the truth. The adage of Pope, who was a free-thinking Roman Catholic, has been circulated round society by innumerable echoes.

> "For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight:
> His can't be wrong whose life is in the right."

This you will perceive is an equivocal expression. In one view of it nothing can be more correct; for in every case a right life, that is, right in the scriptural sense of the term, must proceed from a right creed; if, therefore, the life *be* right, so must also the creed. But the design of the author was to teach that a right life might stand connected with any creed, or no creed, and that, therefore, religious opinions are of no consequence whatever. This you will perceive is the popular and dreadful dogma of infidelity. This bantling of skepticism has been foisted into the christian world, and profanely baptised by the name of charity. But though it may wear the smiling countenance of this heavenly virtue, it has an infidel heart. If this counterfeit, hollow thing, which dares to

* 2 Thes. ii. 11, 12. Gal. i. 8, 9. 2 John 9, 10, 11. Eph. iv. 14. Heb. xiii. 9. 2 Tim. iv. 3. 2 Pet. ii. 1, 2.

take to itself the sacred name of charity, had not renounced the bible, it would have certainly known, that errors in faith are the offspring of a heart wholly or partially unrenewed, and as decisive a proof, so far as they prevail, of a want of religion, as an unsanctified life.

Contend earnestly then for the faith once delivered to the saints. I would not have you bigots. This however, is a vague and plastic term which in the slang of modern infidelity, has been generally applied to every one who attaches importance to religious opinions. If by a bigot, is meant an overweening attachment to sentiments, confessedly of lesser importance than many others; or a blind zeal for opinions, adopted rather from custom than conviction; or a spirit of intolerance, contempt and persecution, towards those who differ from us in the articles of their belief; if this be bigotry, be you no bigots: Abhor and avoid a disposition of this kind. Adopt all your sentiments after a close examination, and upon a full conviction of their truth. Apportion your zeal for their diffusion upon the scale of their relative importance. Exercise the greatest forbearance and candour towards those who differ from you; but at the same time contend for the articles of your faith as matters of infinite consequence. Defend your opinions with an enlightened, dispassionate, but, at the same time ardent zeal. Insist upon the connexion of right sentiments with right feelings, that the former, when really held, lead to the latter, and that the latter can never exist without the former. If *this* is what *is meant by* bigotry, then may you possess it *more and more*. Shrink not from the charge,

if *this* be its meaning in the lips of those who use it. If you partake of true faith and genuine holiness, you must expect that the one will be called enthusiasm, and the other bigotry. Disregard both the accusations, and be not deterred by opprobrious names from the pursuit of eternal life.

Do you ask me what are right sentiments? I reply, search the scriptures for yourselves, with docility, with prayer, with earnestness. No language can express the infinite importance of entering, without delay, on a deep and solemn examination into these matters.* Call no man master, but consult the oracle of heaven. One evil, never enough to be deplored, is, that many people do not and will not distinguish. They are pleased with different preachers, who bring as different gospels as the Koran is different from the bible. They are as ready to put themselves in the way of hearing error as truth, and swallow down whatever comes, provided only it is gracefully administered. Elegant language, good elocution, theatrical attitudes, fascinating imagery, are to them of far more importance than the truth. They are like children rushing into the shop of an apothecary, tasting at random of every vial, and selecting the most imposing in appearance, without the power of distinguishing medicines from poisons, and even where there is some general attachment to right sentiments, in how few cases is this

* Without pledging myself to approve of every expression contained in the answers of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism, I know not where to find a summary of Christian doctrines expressed with so much brevity and so much precision. And although I do not approve of the *practice of teaching* this catechism to children below the age *of twelve, yet all our youth* above that age should be acquainted with *it as a synopsis of right* sentiments in religion.

attended with an enlightened ability to defend and enforce them. Our young people do not sufficiently store their minds with the proofs and arguments of the opinions they have adopted. They are satisfied with believing without proof. This is not the case with the advocates of error. They are instructed in the whole system of attack and defence. They are skilful in all the manœuvres of controversy: sophisms, assertions, interrogatories, arguments, are all at their command. The friends of truth are, in these respects, often behind them. Reposing an unlimited confidence in the invulnerable security, and the impregnable strength of their cause, they do not exercise themselves in the use of their arms, and appear sometimes to a disadvantage in skirmishing with their opponents. Be you not behind them in ability to defend your principles. The truth is of infinite value; may you clearly and comprehensively understand it; cordially and practically believe it; sincerely and ardently love it; and be able both to state it with precision, and to support it with argument.

I cannot conclude this chapter without recommending to you the perusal of an excellent sermon by Dr. Pye Smith, "On the best means of obtaining Satisfaction with Regard to the Truth of Religious Sentiments."

After a suitable introduction, he points out, as the common and principal sources of error with regard to divine things, (1) The weakness of our faculties; (2) Our taking up wrong subjects of investigation; (3) And our being affected *by the secret* influence of sinful dispositions

and habits. Under the last particular we find the following impressive observations:

"'A sinner,' says the wise king of Israel, 'seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not.' The entire want, or the great deficiency, of love, reverence, and devotedness to God, cannot but give a fatal obliquity to our professed researches after truth. Such a state of mind is also invariably connected with wrong affections in relation to ourselves. Instead of an humble, adoring and delightful admiration of the universal perfection of the Most High, there will be pride, self-confidence, and a determination to think at all events favourably of our own dispositions and practices. The judgement of God will be little regarded, and its impression felt very slightly. His supremacy will be the object of secret murmur, or of virtual denial. The heart will rise in dislike against his glorious and unchangeable rectitude, and the necessary obligation of his rational creatures to love him with a perfect heart. His sole and sovereign competency to determine whether at all, to what extent, and in what way and manner, he may be pleased to pardon and bless sinners, will be met by a strong, though perhaps disguised repugnance. And the duty of a cheerful and implicit reliance on the unsullied purity, righteousness and benevolence of Jehovah, notwithstanding the perplexity of present appearances, may indeed be faintly acknowledged in words, but, as to practical effect, it will be treated with neglect, or even with disgust. These, and all other movements of the heart which is under the power of revolt from God, will most certainly darken the understanding, and mislead the judgement; 'evil

will be put for good,' and good will be treated as evil."—pp. 14, 15.

"The remedies of the erroneous tendencies of the human heart, are stated to be—1. The maintenance of *right affections* towards the great Author and Revealer of religious truth. 2. A habit of entire *subjection* to the authority of the Holy Scriptures. 3. The use of all proper methods of acquiring and improving the art of *just reasoning*. 4. Establishment in the evidence and influence of *primary truths*. 5. *Living under the benign and purifying influence of divine truth*. 6. Cautious observations of the *effect of particular sentiments* upon ourselves or others. 7. Keeping in mind, that what has been adopted on impartial inquiry and sufficient evidence, *is not to be lightly given up on the mere occurrence of some new objection*. 8. *Fervent Prayer*.

"The constant, serious, and affectionate practice of this great and necessary duty, will have the most happy effect in obtaining and preserving the rational and scriptural satisfaction of the truth of our sentiments, if they be indeed true; and, if otherwise, of leading us to the timely and beneficial discovery of our errors. Prayer elevates the soul above the mists and darkness of this revolted world, and places us under the very shining of the Everlasting Light. It tends to exterminate the greatest obstruction to the entrance of that light, the prepossessions of sin in the heart. It gives vigour and delicacy to the sanctified perceptions. It guides that holy mental sense, which is the characteristic of the real christian, to the quick discrimination, and the delighted reception of truth and goodness.

Through prayer, the hallowed medium of intercourse with heaven, the devout mind ascends to its closest enjoyment of communion with the Lord God of truth: and from him descend the returns of prayer, 'every good gift, and every perfect gift.' "—pp. 29, 30.

CHAPTER IV.

On the nature of true Religion.

ALL other questions compared with this, are trifles light as air, or but as the dust of the balance: philosophy, literature, commerce, the arts and the sciences, have, it is true, a relative importance; they soften the manners, alleviate the evils, multiply the comforts of life; yet it is impossible to forget that they are the mere embellishments of a scene, which we must shortly quit; the decorations of a theatre, from which the actors and spectators must soon retire together. But *religion* is of infinite and eternal moment, and then developes, most perfectly, its consequences, in that very moment when the importance of all other subjects terminates for ever. A mistake in this affair, persisted in till death, is followed by effects infinitely dreadful, and of eternal duration. You should bring to this inquiry, therefore, my children, a trembling solicitude to be led in the right way.

Some consider religion as a mere notional assent to certain theological opinions, others as a bare attendance on religious ordinances, others as the performance of moral duties. They are all equally wrong: for instead of being any one of these separately and apart from the rest, it is the union of them all. Religion admits of many definitions in Scripture language. It is "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ:" or it is "faith working by love:" or it is receiving "that grace which bringeth salvation, and teacheth us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present evil world:" or it is "denying ourselves, taking up our cross and following after Christ:" or it is being born again of the Spirit, and sanctified by the truth: or it is the supreme love of Christ, or the habitual fear of God. Each one of these phrases is a definition of true piety; but I shall now adopt another, and represent it as "*A right disposition of mind towards God, implanted in our nature by the influence of the Holy Ghost, and exercising itself according to the circumstances in which we are placed.*

Religion is the same in substance in all rational creatures, whether innocent or fallen. In angels, it is still a right disposition towards God; exercising itself in a way of adoration, love, gratitude, and obedience; but not of faith, hope, and repentance, because their circumstances preclude the possibility of these acts. Religion, in reference to fallen man, is a right disposition of mind; but inasmuch as he is a sinful and ruined creature, yet a creature capable *of salvation through* the mediation of Christ, it

must necessarily include in it, in addition to the feelings of angelic piety, all those mental exercises and habits which are suitable to a state of guilt, and a dispensation of mercy.

Let us take each part of the definition by itself.

I. *God* is the *primary object* of religion.

It is not enough that we perform our duties towards our fellow-creatures; but to be truly pious, we must perform our duty towards God. We may be exemplary and even punctilious in discharging every social obligation; we may be moral in the usual acceptation of the term—honourable, amiable, and yet may be all this, without one single spark of true piety; because in all this there may be no reference whatever to God. An atheist may be all this. Until, therefore, the mind is rightly affected towards God, there is no religion, because *He* is the direct and primary object of it. It is something perfectly independent, as to its essence, upon all the social relations. If a man were wrecked, like Alexander Selkirk, on an uninhabited island, where there was no room, of course, for loyalty, honesty, kindness, mercy, justice, truth, or any of the *relative* virtues, the claims of piety would follow him to this dreary and desolate abode; and even there, where he should never hear the sweet music of speech, nor look on the human face divine, he would still be under the obligations of piety; even there one voice would be heard breaking the silence around him, with the solemn injunction of Scripture, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." Bear in recollection then, *my children*, that God, as he is revealed *in his word, is* the direct and primary object of

all true piety; and that the most exemplary discharge of the social duties can be no substitute for that reverence and love and gratitude and obedience which we owe to him.

II. Religion is a *right disposition of mind* towards God. It is not merely a thing of outward forms and ceremonies, but of the *heart*. It is more than an external action, it is a disposition; not only a performance, but a taste; not an involuntary or compulsory pursuit, but a voluntary and agreeable one. That religion must be an internal principle, an affair of the soul, is evident from the nature of its object, of whom it is said, "God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in *spirit* and in truth." As the heart lies all open to him, unless there be religion there, he scorns the uplifted hand and bended knee. It is evident from reason, that piety must have its seat in the breast; for what spiritual excellence can there be in an action, which is either performed from a bad motive, or from none at all. It is evident from revelation. Read such injunctions as these. "My son, give me thine *heart*." "Get thee a new *heart*." "Thy *heart* is not right in the sight of God." "Be renewed in the *spirit of your mind*." "Ye must be born again." Equally in point are all those passages which command us to love God, to fear him, to trust in him, to glorify him: duties, which of course imply the exercise, and the vigorous exercise, of the affections of the mind. Notions however clear, morality however exemplary, are not enough till the current of feeling is turned towards God. A mere cold correctness of deportment, but which leaves the heart in a state

of alienation and estrangement from God, is not the piety of the word of truth.

Now, in consequence of our natural descent from Adam since his fall, we come into the world totally destitute of this right disposition towards God, and grow up under the influence of a contrary temper. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." This is what we mean by the total depravity of human nature; not that there is an absence of all general and praiseworthy feeling towards our fellow-creatures; not that there is the predominance of criminal and vicious appetite; but that there is a total destitution of all right feeling towards God. Before true religion be possessed by one human being, there must of consequence be an entire change of mind, a complete alteration in the disposition.

The scriptures inform us that all are inherently depraved, for "that which is born of the flesh is flesh;" and therefore, with equal explicitness they inform us that all must be changed before they can partake of true piety. This change is so great, that our Lord himself calls it a second birth. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom dom of heaven."

Until this change takes place there cannot be even the commencement of true religion. Whatever is avoided, or whatever is done that bears the semblance of piety, is carried on without a right disposition of mind; and we cannot suppose, that God who sees the heart, is pleased with such service, any more than *we* should be with compliments from a person, whose bosom we knew to be destitute of all right feeling towards us. The mistake, which many make in

religion is, they do not begin with the beginning; they attempt to carry up the superstructure without seeking to have the foundation laid in the renewal of their nature. They profess to serve God outwardly, before they have surrendered their *heart* to his renewing grace. Their religion is a new dress, but not a new nature. It is the mechanical performance of an automaton, not the voluntary actions of a living man. It wants that which alone constitutes piety,—a *right disposition towards God.*

III. This disposition is implanted in the soul *by the power of the Holy Ghost.*

The operations of Deity, in the formation of the material world, are frequently alluded to by the sacred writers, as illustrating the work of Jehovah in renewing the human mind, and bringing forth the beauties of holiness in the human character. The soul of man, as to all spiritual excellence, is in its natural state a chaos; and the same divine Spirit, which brooded on the materials of the formless void; which moved on the face of the deep, and brought order out of confusion, and beauty out of deformity; which said, Let there be light and there was light; now operates on the dark mind, the irregular affections, the hard heart of the sinner, giving true light to the understanding, a right disposition to the soul, submission to the will, and in short creating the whole man anew in Christ Jesus unto good works. This is declared in many passages of the Scriptures. "A new heart also will *I* give you," saith God to the Jews, "and a new spirit will *I* put within you; and *I* will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and *I* will give you a heart of flesh.

And *I* will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes."* To the same effect are our Lord's words to Nicodemus. "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he shall not see the kingdom of heaven." This same truth is often repeated by the apostles. "You hath *he* quickened." "Who hath saved us by washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." "It is God who worketh in us to will and to do." That it must be some power out of man, and beyond himself to effect the change, is evident, from the circumstance, that it is not merely the conduct, but the *disposition* itself, which requires to be changed; and who can reach the *mind*, and regulate the springs of action, but God? Not that we are to lie down in indolent neglect, and say, "If then it is the Holy Ghost who must change the mind, I may give up all concern about the matter, and wait before I attempt to perform the duties of religion, till I feel that I am changed." No; as rational creatures we must use our faculties, consider our case, examine our hearts, tremble at our situation, call upon God in prayer, and give him no rest till he pour out his Spirit upon us. The very circumstance, that we are thus dependent on God, should make us more tremblingly anxious, more importunate in prayer, for divine help. If you were entirely dependent upon the assistance of a fellow-creature for help to recover your property, liberty, or life, would not that very conviction impel you to the door and presence of the person, in all the eloquence and urgency of importunate entreaty?

* Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.

Would you not pour out your very soul in the language of wrestling supplication? Would you not press your suit by every argument, so long as a ray of hope fell upon your spirits! In *this* case, the idea that help must come from another, would not render you indolent, and why should it do so in the business of conversion?

IV. I shall now state how a right disposition of mind towards God *will exercise itself in our circumstances as sinners*, which will bring us more immediately to a consideration of the nature of real religion.

First.—*Reverence, veneration, and awe*, are due from us to that great and glorious Being, who is the author of our existence, the fountain of our comforts, the witness of our actions, and the arbiter of our eternal destiny. How sublimely grand and awful is the character of God, as it is revealed in his word! Acknowledging as you do, my children, his existence, you should make him the object of your habitual fear and dread. You should maintain a constant veneration for him, a trembling deprecation of his wrath. A consciousness of his existence, and of his immediate presence, should never for any great length of time be absent from your mind. The idea of an ever-present, omniscient, omnipotent Spirit, should not only be sometimes before your understanding as an article of faith, but impressed upon your heart as an awful and practical reality. Your very spirits should ever be labouring to apprehend, and apply the representation which the scriptures give us of the deity. A desire to know him, to feel and act towards him with propriety, should be interwoven with the entire habit of your reflections and conduct.

Secondly.—*Penitence* is indispensably necessary.

In order to this, there must be *deep conviction of sin*; for none can mourn over a fault, which he is not convinced that he has committed. A deep consciousness of guilt is one of the first feelings of a renewed mind, and is one of the first operations of the Holy Ghost. "When he is come, he shall *convince* the world of sin." We come to a knowledge of our sinful state, by an acquaintance with the spirituality, purity, and extent of the moral law; "for sin is the transgression of the law." Until we know the law, which is the rule of duty, we cannot know in what way, and to what extent, we have offended against it. The exposition which our Lord has given us of the law, in his sermon on the Mount, informs us that it is not only the overt act of iniquity which makes a man a sinner: but the inward feeling, the imagination, the desire. An unchaste look is a breach of the seventh commandment; a feeling of immoderate anger is a violation of the sixth. Viewing ourselves in such a mirror, and trying ourselves by such a standard, we must all confess ourselves to be guilty of ten thousand sins. And then again we are not only sinful for what we *do amiss;* but for what we *leave undone that is right*, and ought to be done. If therefore we have a right disposition towards God, we must have a deep feeling of depravity and guilt; an impressive sense of moral obliquity; an humbling consciousness of vileness. To the charges of the law, we must cry guilty, guilty. We must not only admit upon the testimony of *others* that we are sinful, but from a perception of the holi-

ness of God's nature, and the purity of his law; we must discern the number, aggravations, and enormity of our offences. We must do homage to infinite holiness, by acknowledging ourselves altogether sinful.

Sorrow is essential to penitence. We cannot have been made partakers of penitence if we do not feel inward grief on the review of our transgressions. We read of "godly *sorrow*, which worketh repentance unto salvation." If we have injured a fellow-creature, the first indication of a right sense of the aggression is a sincere *regret* that we should have acted so. How much more necessary is it that we should be unfeignedly sorry for our innumerable offences against *God*. Sorrow for sin, is not however to be estimated only by violent emotions and copious tears. The passions are much stronger in themselves, and much more excitable, in some than in others; and therefore, the same degree of inward emotion, or of outward grief, is not to be expected from all. The degrees of sorrow, as well as the outward modes of expressing it, will vary, as belonging more to the sensitive nature than to the rational; and for avoiding all scruple and doubtfulness, on this head, it may be laid down for certain, that the least degree of sorrow is sufficient, if it produce reformation; the greatest insufficient, if it do not.

The next step in penitence is *confession*. Real sorrow for sin is always frank and impartial, while false or partial sorrow is prone to concealment, palliation, and apology. There is a wretched proneness in many persons, when convinced of sin, to offer excuses and to endeavour to think

the best of their case. They cannot be brought to admit the charge in all its length and breadth; but they attempt to hide its magnitude from their own eyes. This is a dangerous disposition, and has often come between a man's soul and his salvation. All the great and precious promises of pardon are suspended upon the condition of confession. "If we *confess* our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Confession must be in detail, not in generals only; it must be free and impartial.

Abhorrence of sin is also included in penitence. There can be no real grief for an action, which is not accompanied by a dislike of it. We shall unquestionably *hate* sin, if we partake of godly sorrow. This indeed is the true meaning of the term *repentance*, which does not signify *grief* merely, but an entire change of mind towards sin. Abhorrence of sin is as necessary a part of repentance as grief. Our hatred of transgression must be grounded not merely on viewing it as *an injury to ourselves*, but as *an insult to God.* For penitence, on account of sin, is altogether a different feeling to that which we experience over a fire, a shipwreck, or a disease which has diminished our comforts. Our tears then are not enough, if not followed by abhorrence. If we are sincere in our grief, we shall detest and fly the viper which has stung us, and not cherish and caress the beast, whilst with false tears we bathe the wound we have received.

Thirdly.—*Faith in Jesus Christ* is no less necessary.

Faith is a very important, and most essential part of true religion. Faith in Christ is a firm *practical belief* of the Gospel testimony concern-

ing Christ, a *full persuasion* of the truth of what is declared, and a *confident expectation* of what is promised. The testimony is this. "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." "God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Hence then, faith is believing that Jesus Christ died as a sacrifice of atonement to divine justice, for human guilt, depending on that atonement firmly and exclusively for acceptance with God, and expecting eternal life according to God's promise.

Faith is most obviously as much a part of a right disposition towards God, as penitence. God having given Jesus Christ for the salvation of sinners, and promised to save those who depend upon the atonement, and commanded all to ask for pardon and eternal life; it is manifest, that not to believe, is to dispute the Divine veracity, as well as to rebel against the Divine authority. To believe the Gospel, and to expect salvation through Christ, is to honour all the attributes of Deity at once, is to praise that mercy which prompted the scheme of redemption, that wisdom which devised it, that power which accomplished it, that justice which is satisfied by it, and that truth which engages to bestow its benefits on all that seek them. Not to believe is an act of contempt, which insults Jehovah in every view of his character at once. Until we are brought therefore, actually to depend on Christ so as to accept salvation, we have no real religion.

Fourthly.—*A willingness in all things to obey God*, completes the view, which ought to be given of a right disposition towards him.

There must be a distinct acknowledgement of His right to govern us, and an unreserved surrender of our heart and life to His authority: an habitual desire to do what he has enjoined, to avoid what he has forbidden. Where there is this desire to please, this reluctance to offend God, the individual will read with constancy and attention the sacred volume, which is written for the express purpose of teaching us how to obey and please the Lord. Finding there innumerable injunctions against all kinds of immorality and sin, and as many commands to practise every personal, relative, and social duty, the true Christian will be zealous for all good works. Remembering, that Jesus Christ is proposed there as our example, no less than our atonement, he will strive to be like him in purity, spirituality, submission to the will of God, and devotedness to the divine glory. Nor will he forget to imitate the beautiful meekness, lowliness, and kindness of his deportment: so that the love, which a right view of his atonement never fails to produce, transforms the soul of the believer into his image. Finding in the word of God many commands to cultivate the spirit, and attend on the exercises of devotion; the true Christian will remember the sabbath day to keep it holy, will maintain daily prayer in his closet, and unite himself in the fellowship of some Christian church, to live in communion with believers, and with them to celebrate the sacred supper.

During the trials of life, he will console himself with the promises of grace and the prospects of glory. He will soften his earthly cares by the influence of his heavenly hopes. He will endeavour to keep himself pure from the vices of the world, and shine as a spiritual light amidst surrounding darkness. His great business in this world will be to prepare for a better: and when the time arrives for him to quit the visible for the invisible state, he will bow in meek submission to the will of God, and retire from earth, cheered with the prospect and the expectation of eternal glory.

Such appears to me to be the nature of true religion. Its possessor, daily conscious of his defects, will habitually humble himself before God; and while he seeks forgiveness for past offences, through the blood of Jesus Christ, will as earnestly implore the gracious aid of the Holy Ghost to sanctify him more perfectly for the future.

CHAPTER V.

On the advantages and responsibility of a pious education.

The advantages of any system of means, must of course, as to their value, be estimated by the importance of the end to be obtained, which, in the present case, is the possession of real religion in this world, and eternal happiness in that which is to come. The end to be obtained includes not only a profession of piety in our

present state of being, but all that infinite and everlasting felicity, which piety brings in its train:—of what vast consequence then must be the most suitable means for attaining this sublime purpose!

The value of a thing, my dear children, is sometimes learnt by the want of it; consider therefore, the situation of those young persons, whose parents, careless of their own souls, take no pains for the salvation of their children. In what a hapless situation are such young people placed! They are taught perhaps every thing but religion. They are instructed in all the elegant accomplishments of fashionable life; but how to serve God and obtain eternal salvation, is no part of their education. In their abode, wisdom, in the form of parental piety, is never heard saying, "Hearken ye children, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord." They see cards and other amusements often introduced to the domestic circle, but no bible: they hear singing, but it is not the songs of Zion: there is feasting and conviviality, but no devotion: there is no domestic altar, no family prayer. The Sabbath is marked with the same levity as other days. They go to church perhaps, but hear any thing rather than the pure gospel of Christ. They are taken to every gay party in the neighbourhood, and are studiously trained up for pleasure. They scarcely ever see the lovely form of religion in the circles which they frequent, except, like, its divine author, it be brought there to be despised and rejected of men. How are such young people to be pitied! Who can wonder that *they* do not fear the Lord!

How different has been your lot!—the very contrast of this. From your earliest childhood you have been taught the nature and the necessity of true religion. *Instruction* on these topics has been coeval with the dawn of reason. Every topic of piety has been explained to you as you could bear it. The doctrines of Christianity have been stated and proved, its duties unfolded and enforced. The nature and attributes of God; the extent and obligation of his law; the design and grace of the gospel, have been explained—your sinful state has been clearly set before you; the object of Christ's death pointed out; the necessity of regeneration, justification, and sanctification impressed upon your heart. If you perish, will it be for lack of knowledge? If you miss the path of life, will it be from not having it pointed out?

To instruction has been united *admonition*. With all the tenderness of parental affection, and all the seriousness which the nature of the subject demanded, you have been warned, entreated, and even besought to fear God and seek the salvation of your souls. You have seen the tear glistening in a father's eye, while his tongue addressed to you the fondest wishes of his heart for your eternal happiness.

You have enjoyed the advantage of a system of mild and appropriate *discipline*. Remember you not the time when your budding corruptions were nipped by the kind hand of paternal care; and the blossoms of youthful excellence were sheltered and fostered by a mother's watchful eye? Have they not often reproved you for what was wrong, and commended you for what is right? Have they not by praise, and by dis-

praise judiciously administered, endeavoured to train you up to hate that which is evil, and to cleave to that which is good? Have they not kept you from improper company, and warned you against associates that were likely to injure you? Have they not with weeping eyes, and bleeding hearts, administered that correction which your sins deserved!

Have you not also seen all this enforced by the power of *a holy example*, imperfect, it is true, yet sufficient, like the sun even when partially covered with a mist, to be your guide? You have seen them walking with God, and in fellowship with Christ. You have seen them retiring for prayer, and marked with an impression of devout seriousness they have brought from the presence of God. You cannot doubt that religion was the governing principle of their heart. The happiness, as well as holiness of true piety, has appeared in their conduct. You have seen the cloud of sorrow which affliction brought upon their brow, irradiated with the sun-beams of Christian faith and hope. Thus the whole weight of parental example, has been employed to give impression in favour of religion on your heart.

But the advantage of a pious education rests not here; for you well know that it has procured for you all other religious benefits, which conduct, in the order of means, to the salvation of the soul. You have been taken, from a child, *to hear the Gospel preached* by those who are anxious to save themselves, and them that hear them. You have been associated with religious people, and joined the circles of the righteous, where the claims of religion are respected, and

her holy image has been welcomed with affection, and treated with respect. Religious books have been put into your hands. Schools selected for your education which would aid the work of your parents, and every thing kept out of your way which would be likely to be an impediment to the formation of your religious character, and your pursuits of eternal salvation. Thus, so far as means go, the very avenues of perdition have been blocked up, the way to destruction has been filled with mounds and barriers; while the path of life has been carefully laid open to your view, and every thing done to facilitate your entrance to the road of immortality. You have been born, cradled, and instructed in an element of religion; you have trod the ground, and breathed the atmosphere of piety. What advantages!! Who shall count their number or calculate their value!!

And now think of the *responsibility* which all these privileges entail upon you. This thought fills *me* with trembling for you, if you do not tremble for yourselves. Man is an accountable being, and his accountability to God, is in exact proportion to his opportunities for knowing and doing the will of his Creator. No talents of this kind, that are intrusted to man, are so precious as those of a religious education; and with no persons will God be so awfully strict in judgement, as with those who have possessed them. A law of *proportion*, will be the rule of the final judgement. Ten talents will not be required from those, to whom only five were delivered; nor will only five be demanded from those, with whom ten were

entrusted. This is plainly stated by Christ in that most impressive passage, "That servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask more."* Who upon this scale, shall measure the height and depth of your responsibility? The poor Pagan who hews down a tree, makes a god of its wood, and worships the deity which he has thus fashioned; who lives in all kind of lust, and cruelty, and falsehood,—the Mahometan, who turns his face to the rising sun, and calls upon his prophet,—the rustic, who revels in the village where his father rioted before him, and where neither of them ever heard one parental admonition, nor one gospel sermon—nay, even the infidel who derides the Scripture, and was taught to do it by his sire, will not have so much to account for in the day of scrutiny, as you who have enjoyed the advantages of a pious education. Think, I beseech you, upon all your privileges, the instructions, the warnings, the admonitions, the reproofs you have received even from your infancy—your father's earnest prayers, and your mother's monitory tears—domestic teachings, and ministerial advice—sabbaths spent, and sermons heard—all, all must be accounted for at the last day; all will be demanded in judgement. You may now think lightly of these things, but God does not. *You* may forget them as they pass, but God

* Luke xii. 47, 48.

does not. They are dealt out to you as precious things: the number of them is written down amongst the records of Omniscience, and in that day when the throne shall be set, and the books shall be opened, the improvement of each will be demanded, by a voice at which the universe shall tremble. You will not be tried as one that had only the feeble glimmering of natural reason to guide his perceptions, and his conduct; but as one that walked amidst the noontide splendour of divine revelation, as one that occupied just that station in the moral world, where the light of heaven fell with the clearest and the steadiest brightness.

Do fancy yourself called into judgement to answer for your religious privileges: summoned by a voice which it is impossible to resist, from the throng of trembling spirits waiting for their doom; fancy you hear the voice that commanded the universe into being, saying to you, "Child of the righteous, son of many prayers and much anxiety, give an account of thyself; exhibit the fruits and improvement of all thy rich and innumerable advantages for a life of piety. Ye parents who taught him, bear witness. I intrusted him to your care. Did ye bring him up in the fear and nurture and admonition of the Lord? Resign your trust; deliver your testimony; clear yourselves." Impressive and awful spectacle!! There you stand before the tribunal of God, confronted by the mother that bore you, and the father that loved you. If you have neglected your advantages, and lived without piety, what a testimony will they bear. "Thou art our witness, O God, and that unhappy individual in whom

we once delighted as our child, but whom we now renounce for ever, with what affectionate solicitude, and unwearied perseverance; with how many tears and prayers we laboured for his salvation. But all was useless. This is not the season of mercy, or we would still pour over his guilty head one more fervent prayer for his salvation; but forbidden to commend him to thy mercy, we can now do nothing but leave him to thy justice." Miserable man, what can he say? He is speechless. Conscious guilt leaves him without excuse, and despair seals up his lips in silence. One piercing, agonizing look is directed to his parents, one deep groan escapes his bosom, as the ghosts of murdered opportunities rise upon his vision, and crowd the regions of his fancy. As his distracted eye ranges o'er the millions who stand on the left hand of the Judge, there is not one whose situation he does not envy. The Pagan, the Mahometan, the poor peasant who sinned away his life in a benighted village, even the infidel, going up to receive his doom for blaspheming the God of revelation, appears less guilty, less miserable than he.

But were my pen dipped in the gall of celestial displeasure, I could not describe the weight of the *sentence*, nor the misery which it includes, that will fall upon the ungodly child of righteous parents. Who shall portray the hell of such a fallen spirit, or set forth the torments with which it will be followed to the regions of eternal night? We all know that no sufferings are so dreadful as those which are self-procured; and that self-reproach infuses a bitterness into the cup of wo, which exasperates the anguish *of despair.* Disappointment of long and fondly

cherished hopes is dreadful; but if there be no reason for self-reproach, even this is tolerable: but to suffer, through eternal ages, in the bottomless pit, with no prospect but of misery, no employment but that of numbering over the advantages we once possessed for escaping from the wrath to come—*this* is hell. My children! my children! my heart agonizes as I write. I groan over these lines of my book—these pictures of my fancy. Do take warning. Hearken to these sentiments. Let them have their due weight upon your minds—treasure up this conviction in your minds—that of all lands on the earth, it is the most dreadful to travel to the bottomless pit from a Christian country; and of all the situations in that country, it is the most awful to reach the bottomless pit from the house of godly parents. Let me be any thing in the day of judgement, and in eternal misery, rather than the irreligious child of religious parents.*

CHAPTER VI.

On the most prevailing obstacles which prevent young people from entering on a religious life.

Our Lord has most explicitly taught us, my dear children, that the entrance to the path of life is not unattended with difficulty, nor to be

* There is a little repetition in this chapter, of some of the sentiments in the first; but as the subject led to it, the author was not anxious to avoid it.

accomplished without effort. Into that road, we are not borne by the pressure of the thronging multitude, nor the force of natural inclination. No broad and flowery avenue attracts the eye; no syren songs of worldly pleasure allure the ear: "but strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth to life, and few there be that find it." Hence the admonition—"Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many shall seek to enter in and shall not be able." This implies that there are obstructions to be removed, and difficulties to be surmounted.

The fundamental and universal obstruction with which every one has to contend, and which can be removed only by the power of the Holy Ghost, is the darkness and depravity brought upon human nature by the Fall; and the indulged sensuality, prejudice, and enmity of the carnal mind. But this prevailing depravity manifests itself in various specific forms, according to the different circumstances, constitutions, ages, and tempers of its subjects. It is an inward, and universal evil, exhibiting its opposition to religion in an immense variety of ways.

1. *Self-conceit* is not uncommonly to be met with in the character of the young, and is very much opposed to the spirit of true piety.

This is a sort of epidemic disease, which finds a peculiar susceptibility in persons of your age to receive it. Young in years and experience, they are very apt, nevertheless, to form high notions of themselves, and to fancy they are competent judges of all truth and conduct. They decide, where wiser minds deliberate; speak, where experience is silent, rush forward

with impetuosity, where their sires scarcely creep; and think themselves quite as competent to determine and to act, as those who have witnessed the events of three-score years and ten. This disposition shows itself oftentimes in reference to business; and the bankrupt list has a thousand times, revealed the consequences. But it is seen in more important matters than business. In the gayety of their spirits, and in the efflorescence of youthful energy, *they* see no great need of religion to make them happy; or if *some* religion be necessary, they do not think it requires all that solicitude and caution with which older Christians attend to its concerns: *they* are not so much in danger as some would represent; *they* shall not take up with the humbling, self-abasing, penitential religion of their fathers, but adopt a more rational piety; *they* have reason to guide them, strength to do all that is necessary, and therefore, cannot see the need of so much fear, caution and dependance.

My children, be humble; pride and self-conceit will otherwise be your ruin. Think of your age, and your inexperience. How often, already, have you been misled, by the ardour of youth, in cases where you were most confident that your were right. When the Athenian orator was asked, What is the first grace in oratory? he replied, Pronunciation; the second? Pronunciation; the third? still he replied, Pronunciation: so, if I am asked, what is the first grace in religion? I reply, Humility; the *second? Humility*; the third? still Humility: *and self-conceit is* the first, and the second, and *the third obstruction.*

2 *Love of worldly pleasure* is a great impediment to piety. It has been most profanely said, "Youth is the time for pleasure, manhood for business, old age for religion." It is painful to observe, that if the two latter allotments of human life are neglected, the first is not. Young people too often answer the description given by the apostle, "Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." In youth, there are many temptations to the gratification of this propensity; the senses are vigorous, the spirits lively, the imagination ardent, the passions warm, and the anxieties of life but few and feeble. Hence many give themselves up to the impulses of their corrupt nature, and are held in alienation from a life of piety by a love of pleasure. Some are carried away by a vain and frivolous love of dress and show; others by a delight in conviviality and parties; others by routs, balls, and theatrical representations; others by the sports of the field; others by intemperance and debauchery.

It is admitted that all these gratifications are not equally degrading in themselves, nor equally destructive of reputation and health; but if indulged as the chief good, they may all prevent the mind from attending to the concerns of religion. A predominant love of worldly pleasure, of any kind, is destructive in every point of view. It unfits you for the pursuits, and disinclines you for the toils of business; and thus is the enemy of your worldly interests; it often leads on from gratifications which, in the opinion of the world, are decent and moral, *to those* which are vicious and immoral; it is *incompatible* with the duties and comforts of

domestic life; it prevents the improvement of the understanding, and keeps the mind barren and empty; it prevents us from becoming the benefactors of our species; but its greatest mischief is, that it totally indisposes the mind for religion, and thus extends its mischief to eternity: in short, if cherished and persisted in, it ruins and damns the soul for ever.

My children, beware of this most dangerous propensity; consider whither it leads; check it to the uttermost; and ask grace from heaven to acquire a better taste. "What a hideous case is this, to be so debased in the temper of your minds, as to lose all the laudable appetites and advantages of an intellectual nature; and to be sunk into the deformity of a devil, and into the meanness of a brute! To be so drenched in malignant delights, and in sensual, fading, and surfeiting pleasures, as to forego all real and eternal satisfactions for them, and to entail insupportable and endless miseries upon yourselves by them." Yes, if you live for worldly pleasure, and neglect religion, you are giving up an exceeding great and eternal weight of glory, for light and frivolous gratifications, which are but for a moment. You are, for the sake of a few years' empty mirth; entailing everlasting ages of unmitigated torments.

Besides, though worldly pleasure gratifies, does it satisfy? When the honey is all sucked, does it leave no sting behind? And then, what are the pleasures of the world, compared with those of religion, but the shadow to the substance; the stagnant pool to the fresh and

running fountain; the smoking taper to the mid-day sun? Shall worldly pleasure cheat you of salvation?

3. *Prejudice against the ways of religion, as gloomy,* keeps many from yielding to its claims.

Many young people seem to compare religion to a dark subterranean cavern, to which, as you descend, you quit all that is joyous in life; which is impervious to the light of heaven, and inaccessible to the melodies of creation; where nothing meets the eye but tears, nor the ear but sighs; where the inhabitants, arrayed in sackcloth, converse only in groans; where, in short, a smile is an offence against the superstition that reigns there, and a note of delight would be avenged by the awful genius of the place, with an expulsion of the individual who had dared to be cheerful. *This* religion? No, my children. I will give you another figurative view of it. "Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars: she hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table; she hath sent forth her maidens; she crieth upon the highest places of the city, come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled."*

This is a metaphorical description of religion under the name of wisdom, and the figure of a feast. It is declared in revelation, and all the saints in the universe will confirm the truth of the assertion, that "Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace."†

* Proverbs ix. 1, 5.

† See this proved at large in the chapter on the Pleasures of Religion.

4. *An inconsiderate heedless temper* is with many an obstruction to piety.

There is frequently, in persons of your age and circumstances, a peculiar thoughtlessness of mind: a want of calm consideration, and steady reflection. They do not deliberate and ponder. Their minds seem as light as thistle-down, and as volatile as the butterfly. They are always walking, talking, smiling, but rarely thinking. The meditative mood, the contemplative attitude, is never theirs. If you want them, never look for them at home, but watch for them abroad. Their extreme volatility prevents them from giving due heed even to the concerns of the world; and as for *religion*, though they are immortal creatures, lost sinners invited to salvation, destined to eternity, and hastening to heaven or hell, they have scarcely ever had a serious thought upon the subject: even *these* momentous topics are treated with the utmost lightness of mind. If the eye of any one of this class should range over these pages, let me beseech her to look at her picture, and ask herself if she can admire it. O my young friend, cannot the high themes of eternity make you serious? Placed as you are, on this earth, between the torments of the damned, and the felicities of the redeemed; with the preparations for judgement going on, and the scenes of eternity opening before you; will you laugh out your little share of existence, and flutter through life, till like a bird dropping into a volcano, you fall into the bottomless pit! Let these things soberise your thoughts, and bring you to the subject of religion, with

something like an appropriate seriousness of mind.

5. *Evil companions* have often proved an obstruction to young people in the ways of piety.

Young people are generally inclined for company, and too often it proves a snare to them. Many a hopeful youth, that seemed at one time setting out in the ways of piety, has been arrested in his holy career, by some unsuitable associate, with whom he has joined himself in the bonds of friendship; and thus he who seemed beginning in the spirit has ended in the flesh, leaving his pious friends to exclaim in the tone of grief and disappointment, "Ye did run well, who did hinder you?" How difficult is it, when a young person is first brought under the influence of genuine piety, to break from his former gay commpanions; and yet, if he would persevere in his new course, it *must* be done. In such cases the bonds of association *must* be broken. You must give up your society or your salvation; and can you hesitate?

6. *The misconduct of professing christians, especially of parents*, proves to many young persons, a stone of stumbling, at the entrance of the path of godliness.

They have seen the open immorality, or the secret hypocrisy of those, who profess to be partakers of true piety, and under the influence of disgust and disappointment, are ready to conclude that all are alike, and that there is no reality in religion, no truth in revelation. I know that these things must often prove an obstruction in their way, and have produced in

some instances an unconquerable antipathy to the ways of godliness. Yet is it rational to have our minds thus prejudiced against christianity, by the apostacies of those who were only its *pretended* disciples? But can that system be divine, you exclaim, amongst whose followers there are so many hypocrites?—Can that system, I reply be otherwise than divine, which has outlived them all, and triumphs alike over the apostacies of its seeming friends, and the opposition of its real foes? Considering the numberless instances of this kind which have occurred, even from the beginning, I am persuaded that had not christianity been supported by Omnipotence, nothing more than its name as an ancient delusion, would have reached the nineteenth century. Nothing but that which was sustained by a principle of divine life, could have outlived so much internal decay, and so much external violence. Besides, does not the perpetual effort to counterfeit, prove its real excellence? For who imitates that which is worthless? Look at the bright, as well as at the dark side. Against the troops of deserters and renegades, muster the thronging millions, who have endured temptation, and continued faithful unto death; call up the noble army of martyrs, whom neither dungeons nor fetters, scaffolds nor stakes, could intimidate; who held fast their principles amidst unheard of tortures, and suffered not the king of terrors to rescue from their grasp the doctrines of their faith.

Judge of religion, as it demands to be tried, by its own evidences, and not by the conduct of its professors. Look at it in its own light, and there you will derive a conviction of its truth

and importance, which would make you cling to it in a crisis, when even all men should forsake it. Religion an imposture, because some of its professors are false!! As rationally may you conclude that there is no real orb of day, because by an optical illusion mock suns are sometimes seen in the atmosphere.

Remember your neglect of religion will not be excused, on the ground that your prejudices were shocked by the misconduct of professing christians. Your obligations are in no degree dependant on the manner in which others discharge theirs.

7. *A spirit of procrastination*, has considerable influence, in preventing the young from attending to the claims of religion.

This has been the ruin of multitudes now in hell. How many amongst the lost souls in prison are now rueing the cheat, which was practised upon their judgement, when they were persuaded to put off the affairs of eternity till another time. Perhaps there is not one in perdition, but intended to be religious at some future period. It is recorded of Archius, a Grecian magistrate, that a conspiracy was formed against his life. A friend who knew the plot, dispatched a courier with the intelligence, who, on being admitted to the presence of the magistrate, delivered to him a pacquet with this message:—"My Lord, the person who writes you this letter, conjures you to read it immediately,—it contains serious matters." Archius, who was then at a feast, replied, smiling, "Serious affairs to-morrow," put the pacquet aside, and continued the revel. On that night the plot was executed, the magistrate slain, and

Archius, on the morrow when he intended to read the letters, a mutilated corpse, leaving to the world a fearful example of the effects of procrastination. My children, do not, when God and the preacher say *to-day* give your attention to religion, reply "*to-morrow;*" for alas! on that morrow you may be in——eternity.

Young people are very apt to presume on long life: but on what ground? Have they an assurance? No, not for an hour. Is it a rare thing for young people to die? Go into any church-yard in the kingdom, and learn the contrary from the records of the tombs. Have you any security in the vigour of your constitution from the melancholy change produced by decay and death? "So have I seen a rose newly springing from the clefts of its hood, and at first it was as fair as the morning, and full with the dew of heaven, as a lamb's fleece; but when a ruder breath had forced open its virgin modesty, and dismantled its too youthful and unripe retirements, it began to put on darkness, and to decline to softness, and the symptoms of a sickly age; it bowed the head, and broke its stalk, and at night having lost some of its leaves, and all its beauty, it fell into the portion of weeds and worn-out faces."*

But besides, admitting that you should live, is not your inclination likely, if possible, to be less and less towards religion? Your acts of sin will be confirmed into habits. Your heart will become harder and harder, for it is the

* Jeremy Taylor's Holy Dying, p. 8.

nature of depravity to increase. If you wished to extinguish a fire, would you wait till it was a conflagration? if to cure a cold, would you wait till it was a fever?

What if God should withdraw his spirit, and give you up to total insensibility? For consider his grace is necessary to salvation. Religion is the work of God in the soul of man. Despised and rejected to-day, is he not likely to abandon you to-morrow? and then what a situation are you in? Like a barren rock, insensible both to the beams of the sun, and the showers of heaven! You may felicitate yourselves in these circumstances on the protraction of life, but it is your curse and not your blessing. You would tremble with indescribable horror at the thought of going the next hour to the flame which is never to be quenched; you would account it the climax of ruin. No, it is not. I can tell you something worse than even this. What; worse than going immediately to the bottomless pit? Yes. To live longer abandoned by God! given up to the deceitfulness of sin, and hardness of heart; left to fill up still more to the brim the measure of iniquity; this, this is worse than instant damnation. Horrible as it seems, yet it is true, that many now in torment wish they had been there before: and that they had not been permitted to live and commit those sins, which are the sources of their bitterest sufferings.

These are amongst the most prevailing obstacles which often prevent young people from entering on a life of piety. Happy are they who by the grace of God are enabled to sur-

mount them, and press through these impediments into the kingdom of God.

CHAPTER VII.

On the deceitfulness of the heart.

THE detection of deceit, if not a pleasant employment, is certainly a profitable one; and that man deserves well of society, who puts them upon their guard against a dangerous impostor. The object of this section of my book is to expose the greatest deceiver in the world; whose design is to cheat you, my dear children, not of your property, nor of your liberty, nor of your life; but of what is infinitely dearer than all these—the *salvation of your immortal soul.* His success has been frightful beyond description. Earth is full of his operations—hell of his spoils. Millions of lost souls bewail his success in the bottomless pit, as the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever. Who is this impostor, and what is his name? Is it the false prophet of Mecca? No. The spirit of Paganism? No. The genius of Infidelity? No. It is the human heart. It is to this, that the prophet's description belongs, "Deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." You will perceive, that, to the wiles of this deceiver, *you* are exposed. Let me then request your very serious attention, whilst I lay open to you his deep devices, and endless machinations.

By the deceitfulness of the heart, we are to understand the liability of our judgement to

be perverted, and misled by the depravity of our nature. And the following are the proofs of the fact.

I. *The astonishing ignorance in which many persons remain of their character and motives.*

It is with the mind, as with the countenance, every one seems to know it better than its possessor. Now is not this somewhat singular? With the power of introspection, with access to our spirits every moment, is it not remarkable that any one should remain in ignorance of himself? Yet is it not the case with myriads? How often do we hear persons condemning others for those very faults, of which every one perceives that they themselves are guilty. We have a striking instance of this in David, when the prophet related to him the parable of the little ewe lamb. It is astonishing with what dexterity some persons will ward off the arrows of conviction which are aimed at *their* hearts, and give them a direction towards others. When in preaching or in conversation, a speaker is endeavouring in a covert way to make them feel, that *they* are intended as the object of his censure, they are most busily employed in fastening it upon others, and admire the skill, and applaud the severity, with which it is administered. And when at length it becomes necessary to throw off the disguise, and to declare to them, "Thou art the man," it is quite amusing to see what surprise and incredulity they will manifest, and how they will either smile at the ignorance, or frown on the malice, which could impute to them

faults, of which, however guilty they might be in other respects, they are totally innocent.

This self-deception prevails to a most alarming extent, in the business of personal religion. The road to destruction is crowded with travellers, who vainly suppose that they are walking in the path of life, and whose dreams of happiness nothing will disturb, but the dreadful reality of eternal misery. How can this mistake arise? The scripture most explicitly states the difference between a good man and a wicked one: the line of distinction between conversion and impenitence is broad, and deep, and plain. It can only be accounted for on the ground of the deceitfulness of the heart.

Then, when conviction forces itself upon the mind, and the real character begins to appear, what a degree of evidence will be resisted, and on what mere shadows of proof will men draw a conclusion in their own favour. How they mistake motives which are apparent to every by-stander; and, in some instances, even commend themselves for virtues, when the corresponding vices are ripe in their bosoms.

2. Another proof of the deceitfulness of the heart, lies in *the disguises which it throws over its vices.*

It calls evil good, and good evil. How common is it for men to change the names of their faults, and endeavour to reconcile themselves to sins, which, under their own proper designations, must be regarded as subjects of condemnation. Thus, intemperance and excess are called social disposition and good fellowship; pride is dignity of mind; revenge

is spirit; vain pomp, luxury, and extravagance, are taste, elegance, and refinement; covetousness is prudence; levity, folly, obscenity, are innocent liberty, cheerfulness, and humour. But will a new name, alter the nature of a vice? No: you may clothe a swine in purple and gold, and dress a demon in the robes of an angel of light; and the one is a beast, and the other a devil still.

The same operation of deceit which would *strip vice of its deformity*, would *rob holiness of its beauty*. Tenderness of conscience is called ridiculous precision; zeal against sin is moroseness and ill-nature; seriousness of mind, repulsive melancholy; superior sanctity, disgusting hypocrisy; in short, all spiritual religion is nauseating cant, whining methodism, wild enthusiasm. It is however the climax of this deceitfulness, when vice is committed under the notion that it is a virtue; and this has been done in innumerable instances. Saul of Tarsus thought he was doing God service, while he was destroying the church. The bigots of Rome have persuaded themselves they were doing right while they were shedding the blood of the saints. O the depth of deceit in the human heart!

3. What a proneness is there in most persons *to frame excuses for their sins*, and by what shallow pretexts are they often led to commit iniquity.

Ever since that fatal moment, when our first parents endeavoured to shift the blame of their crime from each other upon the serpent, a disposition to *apologize* for sin, rather than to confess it, has been the hereditary disease of

their offspring. It discovers itself early in the human character: and it is truly affecting to see how much adroitness is manifested by very young children in excusing their faults; and this disposition grows with their growth, and strengthens with their strength. Some excuse their sins on the ground of custom: others plead the smallness of their sins: others endeavour to persuade themselves that the suddenness, and strength of temptation, will be admitted as a justification of their conduct; while some plead the power of example: it is the first offence, say some; it is the force of habit, exclaim others: some attempt to find excuse for their actual sins in the inherent depravity of their nature; others in the peculiarity of their temper and constitution; a few go so far as to lay all their sins upon the Author of their nature. These are but some amongst the many excuses, by which men are first led on to sin; by which they afterwards defend themselves against the accusations of conscience; and which most convincingly demonstrate the deep deceitfulness of the human heart.

4. It is proved also by *the gradual and almost insensible manner in which it leads men on to the commission of sin.*

No man becomes wicked all at once. The way of a sinner in his career has been compared to the course of a stone down a steep hill, the velocity of which is accelerated by every revolution. The heart does not offend, and shock the judgement, by asking for too much at first; it conceals the end of the career, and lets

only so much be seen as is required for the immediate occasion. When the prophet of the Lord disclosed to Hazael his future enormities, he exclaimed, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this?" The exclamation was perfectly honest. At that time, no doubt he was incapable of such wickedness, and it was a sincere revulsion of nature which prompted the expression of his abhorrence. But he knew not his heart. Little by little he was led forward in the course of iniquity, and at length exceeded, by his wickedness, the prophet's prediction. Habit renders all things easy, not excepting the most atrocious crimes. Men have often done that without reluctance or remorse, which, at one period of their lives, they would have shuddered to contemplate. Many have committed forgery, who, at one time, could have been persuaded by no arguments, nor induced by any motives, to wrong an individual of a farthing; and the murderer, whose hands are stained with blood, would probably, a few years or months before, have trembled at the idea of destroying an animal. "When the heart of man is bound by the grace of God, and tied in the golden bands of religion, and watched by angels, and tended by ministers, those nurse-keepers of the soul, it is not easy for a man to wander and the evil of his heart is like the fierceness of lions' whelps; but when he has once broken the hedge, and got into the strength of youth, and the licentiousness of ungoverned age, it is wonderful to observe what a great inundation of mischief, in a very short time, will overflow all the banks of reason and religion. Vice is first pleasing—then it grows

easy—then it is delightful—then it is frequent—then habitual—then confirmed—then the man is independent—then he is obstinate—then he resolves never to repent—then he dies—then he is damned."*

When a young man that has received a pious education, begins to be solicited to break through the restraints imposed upon him by conscience, he can venture only on *lesser sins:* he perhaps only takes a walk on the Sabbath with a friend, or goes to see a play, or joins in one midnight revel: but even this is not done with ease; he hears the voice of an internal monitor, starts and hesitates, but complies. A little remorse follows, but it is soon worn off. The next time the temptation presents itself, his reluctance is diminished, and he *repeats the offence* with less previous hesitation, and less subsequent compunction. What he did once, he now without scruple does *frequently.* His courage is so far increased, and his fear of sin is so far abated, that he is soon emboldened to commit a *greater sin*, and the tavern, and the horse-race are frequented with as little reluctance as the theatre. Conscience now and then remonstrates, but he has acquired the ability *to disregard its warnings*, if not to silence them. In process of time the society of all who make the least pretensions to piety is avoided as troublesome and distressing, and the heedless youth joins himself with companions better suited to his taste. Now his sins grow with vigour under the fostering influence of *evil company*, just as trees which are set in a plantation.

* Jeremy Taylor's Sermons.

By this time the Bible is put out of sight, all prayer neglected, and the Sabbath constantly profaned. At length he feels *the force of custom*, and becomes enslaved by inveterate habit. The admonitions of a father, and the tears of a pious mother, produce no impressions, but such as are like the "morning cloud, or early dew, which soon passeth away." He returns to the society of his evil associates, where parental admonitions are converted into matter of wicked sport. The sinner is *settled now in an evil way;* and the sapling of iniquity has struck his roots deep into the soul of depravity. The voice of conscience is now but rarely heard, and even then only in the feeble whisper of a dying friend. His next stage is *to lose the sense of shame.* He no longer wears a mask, or seeks the shade, but sins openly and without disguise. *Conscience now is quiet;* and without spectre to warn, or angel to deliver, he pursues without a check the career of sin. He can meet a saint without a blush, and hear the voice of warning with a sneer. Would you believe it? he *glories in his shame*, and attempts to justify his conduct. Not content with being wicked, *he attempts to make others as bad as himself*, puts on the character of an apostle of Satan, and, like his master, goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. As he is condemned in all his ways by the Bible, he endeavours to get rid of this troublesome judge, and persuades himself that religion is a cheat. With *infidel principles*, and immoral practices, he now hurries to destruction, polluted and polluting. His parents, whose grey hairs he brought in sorrow to the grave, have

entered on their rest, and in mercy are not permitted to live to witness his shame. His vices leads him to extravagance; his extravagance is beyond his resources, and in an evil hour, under the pressure of claims which he is unable to meet, he commits an act which forfeits his life. He is arrested, tried, convicted, condemned, executed.

This is no fancy picture; it has often occurred. My dear children, see the deceitfulness of sin. Meditate, and tremble, and pray. Be alarmed at little sins, for they lead on to great ones; at acts of sin, for they tend to habits; at common ones, for they issue in those that are uncommon. I have read of a servant who went into a closet, with an intention only to gratify his palate with some sweetmeats, but perceiving some silver articles, he relinquished the meaner prey for these, purloined them, became a confirmed thief, and died at the gallows. Many a prostitute, who has perished in a garret upon straw, commenced her miserable and loathsome course with mere love of dress. Sin is like a fire, which should be extinguished in the first spark, for if it be left to itself, it will soon rage like a conflagration.

5. The last proof of the deceitfulness of the heart which I shall advance is, *the delusive prospects which it presents to the judgement.*

Sometimes it pleads for the commission of sin on the ground of *the pleasure which it affords.* But while it speaks of the honey of gratification, does it also tell of the venom of reflection and punishment?

At other times it suggests *that retreat is easy in the career of sin*, and may be resorted to if its progress be inconvenient. Is it so? The very contrary is true. Every step we advance renders it more and more difficult to return.

Then it urges us forward with the delusive idea that *it is time enough to repent in old age.* But does it say, what indeed is true, that for ought you know, you may die to-morrow? No; and herein is its deceit.

It dwells upon the mercy of God; but is silent upon the subject of his justice.

What think you now of the human heart? Can you question its deceitfulness, or that it is deceitful above all things? How then will you treat it?

Think meanly of it. Surely, with such a picture before you, you will not talk of the moral dignity of human nature; because this would be to talk of the dignity of falsehood and imposition.

Seek to have it renewed by the Holy Ghost. It is a first principle of religion, that the heart must be renewed, and here you see the need of it. It is not only the conduct which is bad, but the *heart*, and therefore it is not only necessary for the conduct to be reformed, but the very *nature* must be regenerated. It is the heart which imposes upon the judgement, and the judgement which misleads the conduct; and, therefore, the root of the evil is not touched until the disposition is changed.

Suspect the heart, and search it. Treat it as you would a man who had deceived you in every possible way, and in innumerable instances had been proved to be false. Continually sus-

pect it. Always act under the supposition, that it is concealing something that is wrong. Perpetually examine it. Enter the house within you; break open every door; go into every apartment; search every corner; sweep every room. Take with you the lamp of revelation, and throw a light on every hiding place.

Watch the heart with all diligence, knowing that out of it are the issues of life. You would observe every attitude, every movement, every look of an impostor who had fixed his eye upon your person and property. Thus treat your hearts. Let every thought, every imagination, every desire, be placed under the most vigilant and ceaseless inspection.

Place it in the hand of God to keep it. "My son, give me thine heart," is his own demand. Give it to him, that it might be filled with his love, and kept by his power. Let it be your daily prayer, "Lord, hold thou me up, and I shall be safe; keep me by thy power through faith unto salvation."

CHAPTER VIII.

On transient devotions.

The church, (said Saurin,) had seldom seen happier days, than those described in the nineteenth chapter of Exodus. God had never diffused his benedictions on a people in richer

abundance. Never had a people gratitude more lively, piety more fervent. The Red Sea had been passed; Pharaoh, and his insolent court were buried in the waves; access to the land of promise was opened: Moses had been admitted to the holy mountain to derive felicity from God the source, and sent to distribute it amongst his countrymen: to these choice favours, promises of new and greater blessings yet were added; and God said, "Ye have seen what I have done unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now, therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people, although all the earth be mine." The people were deeply affected with this collection of miracles. Each individual entered into the same views, and seemed animated with the same passion; all hearts were united, and one voice expressed the sense of all the tribes of Israel;—"all that the Lord hath spoken we will do." But this devotion had one great defect—*it lasted only forty days.* In forty days, the deliverance out of Egypt, the catastrophe of Pharaoh, the passage of the Red Sea, the articles of the covenant; in forty days, promises, vows, oaths, all were effaced from the heart, and forgotten. Moses was absent, the lightning did not glitter, the thunder-claps did not roar, and "the Jews made a calf in Horeb, worshipped that molten image, and changed their glorious God into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass."

Here, my children, was a most melancholy instance of transient devotion. Alas! that such

instances should be so common. Alas! that Jehovah should so frequently have to repeat the ancient reproach, and his ministers have to echo, in sorrowful accents, the painful complaint, "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it passeth away." Nothing, however, is more common than such fugitive impressions. Disappointment of the bitterest kind, is very frequently experienced, both by parents and ministers, in consequence of the sudden turning aside of those young persons, who for a while seemed to run the race that is set before us in the word of God. At one time they appeared to be inflamed with a holy ambition to win the prize of glory, honour and immortality; we saw them start with eagerness, and run with speed; but after a while we met them returning to the barrier, leaving us in the bitterness of our spirits to exclaim, "Ye did run well, what did hinder you?"

The religion I am now describing is not the hypocrisy of the pretending Christian, nor is it the backsliding of the real one; it goes further than the first, but does not go so far as the last. It is sincere of its kind, and in that it goes further than hypocrisy: but it is unfruitful, and in that it is inferior to the piety of the weak and revolting Christian. It is sufficient to discover sin, but not to correct it; sufficient to produce good resolutions, but not to keep them; it softens the heart, but does not renew it; it excites grief, but it does not eradicate evil dispositions. It is a piety of times, opportunities, and circumstances, diversified a thousand ways,

the effect of innumerable causes, but it expires as soon as the causes are removed.

Inconstans was a youth who had enjoyed a pious education; he discovered many amiable qualities, and was often impressed by the religious admonitions he received; but his impressions soon wore off, and he became as careless about his eternal concerns as before. He left the parental roof, and was apprenticed; and his parents having taken care to place him in a pious family, and under the faithful preaching of the word, he still enjoyed all the external means of grace, and still, at times, continued to feel their influence. His attention was oftentimes fixed when hearing the word, and he was sometimes observed to weep. On one occasion in particular, when a funeral sermon had been preached for a young person, a more than ordinary effect was produced upon his mind. He returned from the house of God pensive and dejected, retired to his closet, and with much earnestness prayed to God, resolved to attend more to the claims of religion, and to become a real Christian. The next morning he read the Bible, and prayed, before he left his chamber. This practice he continued day after day. A visible change was produced in his deportment. His seriousness attracted the attention and excited the hopes of his friends. But, by degrees, he relapsed into his former state, gave up reading the Scriptures, then prayer; then he reunited himself with some companions from whom for a season he had withdrawn himself, till at length he was as unconcerned about salvation as ever. Some time after this Inconstans was seized with a fever.

The disease resisted the power of medicine, and baffled the skill of the physician; he grew worse and worse. His alarm became excessive. He sent for his minister and his parents, confessed and bewailed his fickleness. What tears he shed! What sighs he uttered! What vows he made! "Oh if God would but spare me this once; if he would but grant me one more trial; if he would but indulge me with one more opportunity of salvation, how would I improve it to his glory, and my soul's eternal interest." His prayers were answered: he recovered. What became of his vows, resolutions, and promises? The degree of his piety was regulated by the degree of his malady. Devotion rose and fell with his pulse. His zeal kept pace with his fever; as one decreased, the other died away, and the recovery of his health was the resurrection of his sins. Inconstans is at this moment, what he always was, a melancholy specimen of the nature of mere transient religion.

What is wanting in this religion? You will of course reply, "Continuance." This is true. But why did it not continue? I answer, *there was no real change of the heart.* The passions were moved, the feelings were excited, but the disposition remained unaltered. In the affairs of this life, men are often led by the operation of strong causes, to act in opposition to their real character. The cruel tyrant, by some sudden and most affecting appeal to his clemency, may have the spark of pity smitten from his flinty heart: but the flint remaining, the wretch returns again to his practices of blood. The covetous man might, by a vivid description of

want and misery, be for a season melted to liberality; but like the surface thawed for an hour by the sun, and frozen again immediately after the source of heat has retired, his benevolence is immediately chilled by the prevailing frost of his nature. In these cases, as in that of religion, there is a suspension of the natural disposition, not a renewal of it. All religion must be transient, by whatever cause it is produced, and with whatever ardour it should for a season be practised, that does not spring from a regenerated mind. It may, like the grass upon the house-top, or the grain that is scattered in unprepared soil, spring up and flourish for a season, but for want of root it will speedily wither away. Do not then, my dear children, be satisfied with a mere excitement of the feelings, however strong it might happen to prove; but seek to have the general bias of the mind renewed.

You cannot suppose, if you consider only for a moment, that these fugitive impressions will answer the ends of religion, either in this world or in that which is to come. They will not honour God,—they will not sanctify the heart,—they will not comfort the mind,—they will not save the soul,—they will not raise you to heaven,—they will not save you from hell. Instead of preparing you at some future time to receive the gospel, such a state of mind, if persisted in, has a most direct and dangerous tendency to harden the heart. What God in his sovereign grace *may* be pleased to effect, is not for me to say; but as to natural influence, nothing can be more clear than that this fitful

piety is gradually putting the soul farther and farther from true religion. Iron, by being frequently heated, is hardened into steel; water that has been boiled becomes the colder for its previous warmth; soil that has been moistened with the showers of heaven, becomes, when hardened by the sun, less susceptible of impression than before; and that heart which is frequently impressed by religion, without being renewed by it, becomes more and more insensible to its sacred influence. They who have trembled at the terrors of the Lord without being subdued by them, who have outlived their fears without being sanctified by them, will soon come to that degree of insensibility, which will enable them to hear, without being appalled, the most awful denunciations of divine wrath. They who have been melted from time to time by the exhibitions of divine love, but have not been converted by it, will come at length to hear of it with the coldest indifference. It is a dreadful state of mind to be given up to a spirit of slumber, and a callous heart; and nothing is more likely to accelerate the process, than occasional yet ineffectual religious impressions. Can we conceive of any thing more likely to induce Jehovah to give us up to judicial blindness and insensibility, than this tampering with conviction, this trifling with devotional impression? These pious emotions which are occasionally excited, are kind and gentle admonitions that He has come near to the soul, with all the energies of his Spirit: they are the work of mercy knocking at the door of our hearts, and saying, "Open to me that I may enter with salvation in my train." If they are from time

to time neglected, what can be looked for but that the celestial visitor should withdraw, and pronounce, as he retires, the fearful sentence, "Wo unto you when my Spirit departeth from you."

There is something inexpressibly *wicked* in remaining in this state of mind. Such persons are in some respects more sinful than they whose minds have never been in any degree enlightened; whose fears have never been in any degree excited; who have paid no attention whatever to religion, but whose minds are sealed up in ignorance and insensibility. When persons who have taken some steps in religion return again; when they who have come near the kingdom of God, recede from it; and they who have sipped, as it were, of the cup of salvation, withdraw their lips from the water of life, the interpretation of their conduct is this, "We have tried the influence of religion, and do not find it so worthy of our cordial reception as we expected; we have seen something of its glory, and are disappointed; we have tasted something if its sweetness, and, upon the whole, we prefer to remain without it." Thus they are like the spies who brought a false report of the land of promise, and discouraged the people. They defame the character of true piety, and prejudice men's minds against it. They libel the bible, and persuade others to have nothing to do with religion. My children can you endure the thought of this?

Transient devotions *have a great tendency to strengthen the principle of unbelief* in our nature. It is not only very possible, but very common for men to sin themselves into a state of despair

of God's mercy; and none are so likely to do this, as those who have repeatedly gone back to the world after a season of religious impression. In our intercourse with society, if we have greatly offended and insulted a man after professions of decided friendship and warm attachment, we can hardly persuade ourselves to approach him again, or be persuaded to think he will admit us again to the number of his friends. And, as we are prone to argue from ourselves to God, if we have frequently repented, and as frequently returned again to sin, we shall be in great danger of coming to the conclusion that we have sinned past forgiveness, and abandon ourselves to guilt and despair. I have read of a gentleman who lived without any regard to religion till he was taken alarmingly ill, when his conscience was roused from its slumber and he saw the wickedness of his conduct. A minister was sent for, to whom he acknowledged his guilt, and begged an interest in his prayers, at the same time vowing that if God would spare his life, he would alter the course of his behaviour. He was restored to health, and for a while was as good as his word. He set up family worship, maintained private prayer, and frequented the house of God; in short, appeared to be a new man in Christ Jesus. At length he began to relax, and step by step went back to his former state of careless indifference. The hand of affliction again arrested him. His conscience again ascended her tribunal, and in terrible accents arraigned and condemned him. The state of his mind was horrible. The arrows of the Lord pierced him through, the poison whereof drank up his spirits. His friends

entreated him to send for the minister as before. "No," he exclaimed, "I who have trifled with the mercy of God once, cannot expect it now." No persuasions could shake this resolution; no representation of divine grace could remove his despair; and without asking for pardon, he died.

The same despair has, in many other instances, resulted from the same sin of trifling with religious impressions.

These pages will probably be read by some, whose minds are under religious concern. Your situation is more critical and important than any language which I could employ, would enable me to represent. If your present anxiety subsides into your former carelessness, you are in the most imminent danger of being left to the depravity of your nature. God is now approaching you in the exercise of his love, and waiting that he may be gracious. Seek him while he is to be found, call upon him while he is near. The soft breezes of celestial influence are passing over you, seize the auspicious season, and hoist every sail to catch the breath of heaven. Tremble at the thought of losing your present feelings. Be much and earnest in prayer to God, that he would not suffer you to relapse into unconcern and neglect. Take every possible means to preserve and deepen your present convictions. Read the Scriptures with renewed diligence. Go with increased earnestness, and interest, and prayer, to the house of God. Endeavour to gain clearer views of the truth as it is in Jesus, and labour to have your mind instructed as well as your heart impressed. Be satisfied with nothing short of a renewed mind, the new birth. Be upon your guard against self-depend-

ance. Watch against this, as much as against grosser sins. Consider yourself as a little child, who can do nothing without God. Study your own sinfulness in the glass of God's holy law. Grow in humility: it is not well for a plant to shoot upwards quickly, before it has taken deep root; if there be no fibres in the earth, and no moisture at the root, whatever blossoms or fruit there be in the branches, they will soon fall off; and in the same way, if your religion do not strike root in humility, and be not moistened with the tears of penitential grief, whatever blossoms of joy or fruits of zeal there may be on the mind or conduct, they will soon drop off under the next gust or heat of temptation. Take heed of secret sinning. A single lust unmortified will be like a worm at the root of the newly-planted piety of your soul. Continually remember that it is yet but the beginning of religion with you. Do not rest here; believe in the Lord Jesus Christ: nothing short of this will save you: without faith, all you have felt, or can feel, will do you no good: you must come to Christ, and be anxious to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of God our Saviour.

Some, it is probable, will read these lines, who have had religious impressions, and lost them. Your goodness has vanished like the cloud of the morning; and like the early dew has sparkled and exhaled. Sometimes you exclaim, with an emphasis of deep melancholy,

"What peaceful hours I once enjoy'd!
How sweet their mem'ry still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill."

You *are* not, you *cannot* be happy, Oh no: the din of pleasure or of business cannot drown the voice of conscience: a pause now and then occurs, when its thunders are heard, and heard with indiscribable alarm. Sometimes, in the midst of your pleasures, when all around is jollity and mirth, *you* see a spectacle which others do not see, and are terrified by a mystic hand which writes your doom upon the wall. From that moment there is no more joy for you. Sometimes you almost curse the hour when the voice of a faithful preacher lodged conviction in your bosom, and half spoiled you for a man of pleasure and the world. You look with almost envy on those who, by never having been taught to fear God, are wrapt in total darkness, and see not the dim spectres, the half discovered shapes of mischief, which in the twilight of your soul, present themselves to *your* affrighted vision. At other times, a little relenting, you exclaim, "O that it were with me as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shined upon my tabernacle. What would I give to recall the views and feelings of those days. Happy seasons! Ye are fled like visions of spiritual beauty. And are ye fled for ever? Can no power recall you to this troubled mind?" Yes, my young friend, they are all within reach, lingering to return. Fly to God in prayer, beseech him to have mercy upon you. Implore him to rouse you from the slumber into which you have fallen. Beware of the chilling influence of despondency. There is no room for despair. Covet the possession of true religion. Examine for the cause which destroyed your impressions in the time that is past. Was it some improper

companion? Abandon him for ever, as you would a viper. Was it some situation unfriendly to godliness, which you voluntarily chose, as Lot did Sodom, on account of its worldly advantages? Relinquish it without delay. Escape for thy life, and tarry not in all the plain. Was it some besetting sin, dear as a right eye, or useful as a right hand? Pluck it out, tear it off without hesitation or regret, for is it not better to make this sacrifice, than to lose eternal salvation, and endure everlasting torments? Was it self-dependence, self-confidence? Now put your case into the hand of Omnipotence, and call upon God. Ask for the Holy Ghost to renew, to sanctify, and to keep your soul. Learn from your past failure what to do, and what to avoid for the future. Believe the gospel, which declares that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin. It was faith that was wanting, in the first instance, to give permanence to your religious impressions. There was no belief, no full persuasion, no practical conviction, of the truth of the gospel. Your religious feelings were like the stream raised by external and adventitious causes, but there was no spring. You stopped short of believing, you made no surrender of the soul to Christ, nor committed yourselves to him, to be justified by his righteousness, and to be sanctified by his spirit. This do and live.

CHAPTER IX.

On decision of character in religion.

How deep, and how just a reproach did the prophet cast upon the tribes of Israel, when he addressed to the assembled multitudes on Mount Carmel, that memorable interrogation, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, follow him." From this it appears they were in a state of indecision, in reference to the most momentous question in the universe, not wholly satisfied that they were doing right in worshipping Baal, yet not sufficiently resolute to abandon his service. What a criminal, what a degrading, what a wretched state of mind! Not decided whom they would acknowledge to be their God! To whom they would pay divine homage! But is this state of mind, my dear children, uncommon? By no means. To how many of the youth who attend our places of devotional resort, could we address, with propriety, the same question, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" How many are there who can go no farther than Agrippa, when he said to Paul, "*Almost* thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Almost! Only almost persuaded to be a Christian! What a melancholy thought!!

In the last chapter you saw, in the character of *Inconstans*, an instance of this indecision. Did you admire it? Impossible. What was wanting? —*Decision.* But what do I mean by decision? "A fixed purpose, not made in haste, but with much deliberation; not in our own strength, but

in reliance on the grace of God; without delay, and at all risks, to seek the salvation of the soul through faith in Christ, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present evil world." It includes an inflexible severity of conviction, that this is the one great thing we have in this world to do, and such a concentration of all the energies of our soul in this mighty business, as to idle spectators shall put on the appearance of enthusiasm. It is such a purpose as subordinates every thing to itself. In opposition to transient devotion, it is permanent; in opposition to fluctuating opinions, it is a fixed abiding resolution; in opposition to mere occasional acts, it is an indelible character, an indestructible habit. In short, it is faith in opposition to mere opinion and speculation: it is actually receiving Christ instead of talking about him. It is not like the vapour which, after attracting every eye by its meteoric splendour, vanisheth away while yet the surprised and delighted spectator beholds its luminous course; but it is like the shining light which holds on its way in the heavens, and shineth more and more unto the perfect day. It is attended with a relinquishment of former associations, former pursuits and pleasures, and the embracing all such as are on the side of religion. We have a fine instance of this in the heroic leader of the hosts of the Lord, when looking round upon the wavering tribes of Israel he exclaimed, "Let others do what they will, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Another example equally splendid, was presented by the great apostle of the Gentiles, when with the perspective of his suffering career before his eyes, he gave utterance to

that burst of sublime heroism, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I might fulfil the ministry I have received of the Lord, and finish my course with joy." Similar to this is the language of a decided Christian, "Self-denial, ridicule, rage, mortification, loss, all are nothing to me, so that I may believe the Gospel, live in the fear of God, die in his favour, and, through the merits of Christ, be received to everlasting glory."

It will be proper to state here the reasons why so many that have strong impressions occasionally made upon their minds, are not thoroughly and decidedly engaged in the practice of religion. Some of these will be found in the chapter "On the Obstacles of Piety," but there are others which are still more specific in reference to the case before us.

There is in many *a want of deep serious consideration.* They do not follow up the subject of religion, even when it has been impressed with some degree of force upon their hearts. When emotions have been excited they do not cherish them; but go to their usual conversation, company, or business, instead of entering into their closets to examine their hearts, and to apply the subjects they have heard. I have read of a person, who being an officer in the army, then about to embark for the continent, came to a Christian friend, and told him that he had a great many serious thoughts about the state of his soul, and was resolved to lead a new life; but, said he, there is such a company I must be with to-night; I wish I could disengage myself from them. His friend of course attempted to dissuade him from joining the party. He,

notwithstanding, went to them, forgot all his serious thoughts when there; was drawn into the revelry of the night; the following day went abroad; and the next news his friend heard of him was, that he was killed in action. Thus his vain companions extinguished his serious thoughts, diverted his good resolutions, and, by his own consent, robbed him of his eternal salvation.

Another cause of irresolution is, *the feeble and uncertain perceptions which many persons have of divine and spiritual things.* They have a dim view of the truths of revelation, but they appear like objects in a mist, too indistinct to be made the matter of pursuit. Hence it is of tremendous consequence, that when a young person becomes in any degree serious about religion, he should instantly betake himself to all proper means for informing his judgement on the nature of true religion. He should read the Scriptures with intense application of mind, listen to the preaching of the word with great fixedness of attention, and peruse good books with much seriousness of mind.*

The dominion of some one prevailing sin, if cherished and indulged, has a most fatal influence in preventing decision. Herod would do many things, but not part from Herodias. Felix was moved by Paul's preaching, but he would not give up covetousness. Thus it is with many; they admit the claims of religion; admire its beauty; are moved by its force; resolve to submit to its influence; but then there is some besetting sin, which, when they come to the

* Doddridge's "Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul," is a standard treatise.

point, they cannot be induced to sacrifice. Every plant has some leading root which connects it with the soil in which it grows, on which more than any of the rest it is dependent for support and nourishment. So it is in the human heart; there is in most persons some prevailing corruption of nature, which more than any of the rest holds the heart to an unregenerate state, and to which very particular attention must be paid in the business of religion. This sin may be different in different persons: but whatever it be, it must be destroyed, or it will destroy us.

Fear of persecution operates in many to prevent decision. You are deterred probably, my children, from giving up yourselves to the influence of piety, by the apprehensions that you shall be called to endure the ridicule of those with whom you have been accustomed to associate, and who, being unfriendly to religion, will vent their scorn and contempt on those who submit to its claims. It is impossible that I can be so ignorant of the irreconcileable enmity existing, and destined ever to exist, between religion and the depravity of human nature; or the usual practice of those who hate religion, as to promise you an exemption from the sneers of the scorner, if you walk in the paths of wisdom. The only weapons which many are able to wield against Christianity are sneers; for there is no mind so imbecile, no fool *so* foolish, as not to be able to laugh; the individual, who could no more argue than an infant could use the sword or brandish the spear of Goliath, can shoot out the lip, and cry methodist, puritan, and fanatic. The power to argue is comparatively rare, but almost every village in the kingdom

will furnish a mob of little minds, to follow after religion as it passes by, and which, like the children of Bethel, persecuting the prophet of the Lord, will ridicule its venerable form.* A morbid sensibility to shame, I am perfectly convinced has kept not a few young people from piety. They cannot bear the broad loud laugh, the contemptuous sneer, the witty jest. They cannot endure the attack of the profane, nor the raillery of the impious. They blush, and conceal their secret attachment to piety directly it is assailed. But, my children, where is the dignity, or the courage of your mind? Are you indeed convinced of the truth of Christianity, and the justice of its claims, and suffer yourselves to be vanquished by the laugh of folly? What! flee from the enemy of your souls, and surrender your salvation, when he only hisses at you in the skin of a fool! What though the world were to unite its scorn; shall this deter you from acting, when God, truth, heaven, the bible, conscience, salvation, saints, angels, are all on your side? What! when your spirit has plumed her wings of faith and hope for flight to heaven, shall she give up the dazzling object of her high ambition, and cower down on earth, because she is watched and ridiculed by the witling? Or shall her eagle pinions be blown from their lofty course by the scoff of the scorner? *Be decided*, and all this mean and feeble kind of persecution will soon cease.

* Never did Satan invent a more successful weapon against religion than ridicule. This apparently mean and contemptible engine, like the pike-head of modern warfare, may be circulated widely, and put into ten thousand hands, which could make nothing of a more dignified kind of instrument. By this means he can arm the *levy en masse* of his dominions, who could do nothing in the ranks of the regular troops, or with the artillery of infidelity.

Before that sublime and unbending decision, which dares to be singular, which nothing can divert from its purpose, which nothing can diminish in its ardour, which clings the closer to its object for all the efforts that are employed to detach it from the pursuit; I say before that inflexible spirit, it is astonishing to see how the space clears away, and how soon she is left to pursue her course, while all the tribe of little, pecking, cavilling, noisy minds, drop down into their hedges, and leave the eagle to her course.

"This invincibility of temper," says the profoundest and most eloquent essayist in the English language, "will often make the scoffers themselves tired of the sport. They begin to feel that against such a man it is a poor kind of hostility to laugh. There is nothing that people are more mortified to spend in vain than their scorn. A man of the right kind would say, upon an intimation that he is opposed by scorn, 'They will laugh, will they? I have something else to do than to trouble myself about their mirth. I do not care if the whole neighbourhood were to laugh in a chorus. I should indeed be sorry to see or hear such a number of fools, but pleased enough to find that they did not consider me one of their stamp. The good to result from my project will not be less, because vain and shallow minds, that cannot understand it, are diverted at it, and at me. What should I think of my pursuits, if every trivial thoughtless being could comprehend, or would applaud them; and of myself, if my courage needed levity and ignorance for their allies, or could shrink at their sneers?'"*

* See Foster's "Essay on Decision of character."—I should deem it an insult to my readers, to suppose they have not read these Essays.

My children, think of the importance of the matter to be decided upon—the service of God, the pursuit of immortality, the salvation of the soul—and shall a false shame deter you from the pursuit? Think of the example of Jesus Christ, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame. Look at this divine sufferer, as he is presented to us in the hall of Pilate, when he was made the object of every species of scorn and indignity, and will you shrink from a few sneers and scoffs for *Him?* Remember our Lord's most alarming language, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, and with the holy angels." Anticipate, if you can, the shame, the disgrace, the mortification, the torment, of being disowned, rejected, and abandoned by Christ, before assembled worlds; and let that be a preservative against being ashamed of him now.

It is time now to set before you *the evils of indecision*, as a motive to induce you to seek after the opposite temper.

Such a temper is most *unreasonable*, if you consider both the importance of the subject, and the means you possess of coming to a speedy and right decision. Is it a matter of trifling moment? Yes, if God, and eternity, and salvation, and heaven and hell are trifles. If religion be a trifle, where, in all the universe, shall we find

and not less so to their Author, to suppose that they needed my recommendation. I cannot help, however, enjoining on my readers to read the Essay from which the above extract is made, with the resolution to seek, and the prayer to obtain, all that decision which is there so eloquently described, not only in reference to every good work in general, but to religion in particular.

any thing that is important? Irresolution here, is to be undetermined whether you will be the friend or the enemy of God; whether you will live in this world under the favour or the curse of Jehovah, and in the world to come, in the torments of the bottomless pit, or the felicities of the heavenly city; whether you will choose condemnation or salvation. There is no language which can describe, there is no allusion which can illustrate, the folly of indecision in religion. The irresolution of a slave, whether he should continue to groan in fetters, or be free; of the leper, whether he should still be covered with the most loathsome disease, or enjoy the glow of health; of the condemned criminal, whether he should choose an honourable life, or the most torturing and ignominious death; is not marked with such desperate folly as an undecided state of mind about personal religion. *The Scripture demands decision*, and it demands it in these striking words, "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, death and evil; therefore choose." Yet some are undecided whether they will serve God, their Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, and inherit eternal life; or yield themselves to Satan, their destroyer, and suffer the bitter pains of eternal death. If the matter were involved in obscurity, as to what was your duty or your interest, there would be some apology; but when both are as clear as the day, the folly of indecision is so palpably manifest, as to entail a most fearful degree of guilt upon the conscience of the irresolute.

Indecision is *contemptible*. "Unstable as water thou shalt not excel," is a character which no

one ever pretended to admire. In the ordinary affairs of life, indecision renders a man an object of pity or contempt. It is a poor disgraceful thing not to be able to answer with some degree of firmness to the questions, What will you be? What will you do? It is a pitiable thing to see a creature, with all the faculties of a rational being about him, so irresolute and undecided, as almost to wish that he could exchange reason for instinct, in order that he might be spared the trouble of thinking, and the pain of choosing: a poor, dependent, powerless creature, that floats like a feather or a chip along the stream of time, belonging to whatever can seize him; and without one effort of resistance, whirled in every little eddy, and intercepted by every little twig. But how much more disgraceful is this irresoluteness of mind in the affairs of religion, where there are so many means, and so many motives for coming to a just conclusion. To be blown about like thistle-down by every wind of doctrine, and carried just wherever the gust or the current impels, is as dishonourable to our understanding as it is detrimental to our salvation.

Indecision is *uncomfortable.* Suspense is always painful. Hesitation as to the steps we shall take, and the conduct we shall pursue, is a most undesirable state of mind: and this uneasiness will be in exact proportion to the importance of the business to be decided, and to the degree of compunction we feel for not deciding upon a course, which we cannot help thinking, upon the whole, is the right one. My children, the undecided cannot be altogether easy in their present fluctuating state of mind. No: directed

one way by conviction, and dragged another by inclination: determining at one time to serve God fully, and at another smarting under the guilt of broken vows: resolved on the Sabbath, and irresolute on the Monday: sometimes advancing with courage, and then again retreating with fear and shame: no, *this* is not the way to be happy. You may as well expect peace on the field of battle, as in the bosom where such a conflict is carried on. Look up to God, and ask for grace to terminate by decided piety the dreadful strife, if indeed it be carried on in your breast.

Indecision is *dangerous*. Consider the uncertainty of life. How soon and how suddenly the King of Terrors may arrest you, and bear you to his dark domain. Some acute, imflammatory disease, in a few days may extinguish life; or a fatal accident, which leaves you no leisure even to bid adieu to those you love on earth, may hurry you into eternity. *And then what becomes of you?* In a state of indecision you are unprepared for death, for judgement, for heaven. You are within the flood-mark of divine vengeance. God accounts all those to be decidedly against him, who are not decidedly for him. There is, properly speaking, no middle ground between regeneracy and unregeneracy, between conversion and unconversion, and therefore he that does not occupy the one, is found within the limits of the other. You are a child or an enemy of God. Whatever may be your occasional relentings, your transient emotions, your ineffectual desires, if you do not become decidedly pious, God will take no account of these things, but treat you, if you die in this state, as

one that had decided against him. Can you then linger when death and hell do not linger? Can you halt, hesitate, and fluctuate, when death may the very next hour decide the business for you? And, oh! if you *should* die without decision, what will be *your* reflections, and what will be *ours!* How bitterly will you exclaim, "Fool that I was, to let any thing interfere with my eternal salvation; to let any thing interpose between my soul and her everlasting welfare. Why, why did I hesitate? I saw the excellence, I coveted the possession of religion. Often I felt my heart rising to go and surrender unreservedly to God; I wept, I prayed, I resolved; but that accursed lust, in which I took pleasure, held me fast, and rather than tear myself from it, I let go the hope of eternal life. I was afraid of a little ridicule, which I ought to have disregarded or despised, and when I seemed near the kingdom was ruined by indecision. While I hesitated death seized me, and now I shall be exhibited by the light of this flame in which I burn for ever, an awful proof of the folly and the danger of indecision. Wo, eternal wo upon my wretched spirit!"

Spare yourselves, my dear children, these dreadful reflections, this inconceivable torment. Without an hour's delay, resign yourselves to God and the influence of true religion. Decide the doubtful point. Believe and obey.

CHAPTER X.

On the pleasures of a religious life.

A DESIRE after happiness, my dear children, is inseparable from the human mind. It is the natural and healthy craving of our spirit; an appetite which we have neither will nor power to destroy, and for which all mankind are busily employed in making provision. This is as natural, as for birds to fly, or fishes to swim. For this the scholar and the philosopher, who think it consists in knowledge, pore over their books and their apparatus, light the midnight lamp, and keep frequent vigils, when the world around them is asleep. For this the warrior, who thinks that happiness is inseparably united with fame, pursues that bubble through the gory field of conflict, and is as lavish of his life, as if it were not worth a soldier's pay. The worldling, with whom happiness and *wealth* are kindred terms, worships daily at the shrine of Mammon, and offers earnest prayers for the golden shower. The voluptuary gratifies every craving sense, rejoices in the midnight revel, renders himself vile, and yet tells you he is in the chase of happiness. The ambitious man, conceiving that the great desideratum blossoms on the sceptre, and hangs in rich clusters from the throne, consumes one half of his life, and embitters the other half, in climbing the giddy elevation of royalty. All these, however, have confessed their disappointment; and have retired from the stage exclaiming, in reference to happiness, what Brutus, just before he stabbed him-

self, did in reference to virtue, "I have pursued thee every where, and found thee nothing but a name." This, however, is a mistake; for both virtue and happiness are glorious realities, and if they are not found, it is merely because they are not sought from the right sources.

We may affirm of pleasure what Job did of wisdom, "There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen: the lion's whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it. But where shall" *happiness* "be found, and where is the place of" *enjoyment?* "Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. The depth saith, It is not in me; and the sea saith, It is not with me. It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. Whence then cometh" *happiness,* "and where is the place of" *enjoyment?* "seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears. God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof. When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder; then did he see it and declare it; he prepared it, yea, and searched it out. And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, all her paths are peace."

Happiness has no other equivalent term than religion, and this is a moral synonym. If, indeed, the case were *otherwise,* and religion, so

far as the present world is concerned, entailed nothing but wretchedness, yet, as it leads to eternal felicity in the world to come, it is most manifestly our interest to attend to its claims. The poor Hindoo devotee, who endures all kind of tortures under the idea that it is the only way to eternal felicity, acts with perfect rationality, if you allow his data. A life protracted to the length of Methuselah's, and filled with penances and pilgrimages, should be willingly and thankfully endured, if salvation could be procured by no other means. In the prospect of eternity, with heaven spreading out its ineffable glories, and hell uncovering its dreadful horrors, the only question which a rational creature should allow himself to ask is, "What is necessary to avoid the torments of the one, and secure the felicities of the other?" and on being told "Religion," he should apply with all the energies of his soul to this great business, without scarcely allowing himself to ask whether its duties are pleasant or irksome. The man who is journeying to take possession of a kingdom, scarcely thinks it worth his while to inquire whether the road be through a wilderness or a paradise. It is enough for him to know, that it is the only road to the throne. Hence, the representation of the *pleasures* of religion, is a sort of gratuity in this subject. It serves, however, to leave those still more destitute of excuse, who live in the neglect of piety; and, in this view, may have still greater power to rouse the conscience.

1. That religion is pleasure, will appear, if you consider *what part of our nature it more particularly employs and gratifies.*

It is not the gratification of the *senses*, or of the animal part of our nature, but a provision for *the immaterial and immortal mind.* The mind of man is an image not only of God's spirituality, but of his infinity. It is not like the senses, limited to this or that kind of object; as the sight intermeddles not with that which affects the smell; but with an universal superintendance, it arbitrates upon, and takes them in, all. It is, as I may say, an ocean, into which all the little rivulets of sensation, both external and internal, discharge themselves. Now this is that part of man to which the exercises of religion properly belong. The pleasures of the understanding, in the contemplation of truth, have been sometimes so great, so intense, so engrossing of all the powers of the soul, that there has been no room left for any other kind of pleasure. How short of this are the delights of the epicure! How vastly disproportionate are the pleasures of the eating, and of the thinking man! Indeed, says Dr. South, as different as the silence of an Archimides in the study of a problem, and the stillness of a sow at her wash. Nothing is comparable to the pleasures of mind; these are enjoyed by the spirits above, by Jesus Christ, and the great and blessed God.

Think what objects religion brings before the mind, as the sources of its pleasure: no less than the great God himself, and that both in his nature and in his works. For the eye of religion, like that of the eagle, directs itself chiefly to the sun, to a glory that neither admits of a superior nor an equal. The mind is conversant, in the exercises of piety, with all the most stupendous events that have ever occurred in the

history of the universe, or that ever will transpire till the close of time. The creation of the world; its government by a universal Providence; its redemption by the death of Christ; its conversion by the power of the Holy Ghost; its trial before the bar of God; the immortality of the soul; the resurrection of the body; the certainty of an eternal existence; the secrets of the unseen state; subjects, all of them of the loftiest and sublimest kind, which have engaged the inquiries of the profoundest intellects, are the matter of contemplation to real piety. What topics are these for our reason, under the guidance of religion, to study: what an ocean to swim in, what a heaven to soar in: what heights to measure, what depths to fathom. Here are subjects, which, from their infinite vastness, must be ever new, and ever fresh; which can be never laid aside as dry or empty. If novelty is the parent of pleasure, here it may be found; for although the subject itself is the same, some new view of it, some fresh discovery of its wonders, is ever bursting upon the mind of the devout and attentive inquirer after truth.

How then can religion be otherwise than pleasant, when it is the exercise of the noble faculties of the mind, upon the sublimest topics of mental investigation; the voluntary, excursive, endless pursuits of the human understanding in the region of eternal truth. Never was there a more interesting or important inquiry than that proposed by Pilate to the illustrious Prisoner at his bar; and if the latter thought it not proper to answer it, it was not to show that the question was insignificant, but to condemn the light and flippant manner in which a subject so

important was taken up. Religion can answer the question, and with an ecstacy greater than that of the ancient Mathematician, exclaims, "I have found it: I have found it." The Bible is not only true, but TRUTH. It contains that which deserves this sublime emphasis. It settles the disputes of ages, and of philosophers, and makes known what is truth, and where it is to be found. It brings us from amongst the quick-sands and shelves, and rocks of skepticism, ignorance, and error, and shows us that goodly land, in quest of which myriads of minds have sailed, and multitudes have been wrecked; and religion is setting our foot on this shore, and dwelling in the region of eternal truth.

2. That a religious life is pleasant, is evident from *the nature of religion itself.*

Religion is a principle of *spiritual life* in the soul. Now all the exercises and acts of vitality are agreeable. To see, to hear, to taste, to walk, are all agreeable, because they are the voluntary energies of inward life. So religion, in all its duties, is the exercise of a living principle in the soul: it is a new spiritual existence. Piety is a spiritual *taste.* Hence it is said, "If so be ye have *tasted* that the Lord is gracious." No matter what the object of a taste is, the exercises of it are always agreeable. The painter goes with delight to his picture; the musician to his instrument; the sculptor to his bust; because they have a *taste* for these pursuits. The same feeling of delight attends the Christian to the exercises of godliness; and this is his language, "It is a good thing to give thanks, and to draw near to God. O how I love thy law! it is sweeter to my taste than honey.

How amiable are thy tabernacles." Religion, where it is real, is the natural element of a Christian; and every creature rejoices in its own appropriate sphere. If, my children, you consider true piety with disgust, as a hard, unnatural, involuntary thing, you are totally ignorant of its nature, entirely destitute of its influence, and no wonder you cannot attach to it the idea of pleasure: but viewing it as it ought to be viewed, in the light of a new nature, you will perceive that it admits of most exalted delight.

3. Consider the *miseries which it prevents.*

It does not, it is true, prevent sickness, poverty, or misfortune: it does not fence off from the wilderness of this world, a mystic inclosure, within which the ills of life never intrude. No; these things happen to all alike: but how small a portion of human wretchedness flows from these sources, compared with that which arises from the dispositions of the heart. "The mind is its own place, can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven." Men carry the springs of their happiness or misery in their own bosom. Hence it is said of the wicked, "that they are like the troubled sea which cannot rest, which is never at peace, but continually casting up mire and dirt." In contrast with which, it is affirmed that "the work of righteousness is peace; and that the good man shall be satisfied from himself." Would you behold the misery entailed by *pride*, look at Haman; by *covetousness*, look at Ahab; by *malice*, look at Cain; by *profaneness* and *sensuality*, united with the forebodings of a guilty conscience, look at Belshazzar; by *envy*, and a consciousness of be-

ing rejected of God, look at Saul; by *revenge*, look at Herodias writhing beneath the accusations of John, and thirsting for his blood; by *apostacy*, look at Judas. Religion would have prevented all this, and it will prevent similar misery in you. Hearken to the confessions of the outcast in the land of his banishment; of the felon in his irons, and in his dungeon; of the prostitute expiring upon her bed of straw; of the malefactor at the gallows—"Wretched creature that I am, abhorred of men, accursed of God! To what have my crimes brought me!"* Religion, my children, prevents all this; all that wretchedness which is the result of crime, is cut off by the influence of genuine piety. Misery prevented is happiness gained.

4. Dwell upon the *privileges it confers.*

To a man who is a partaker of its genuine influence, all the sins he has committed, be they ever so numerous or so great, are all forgiven, and he is introduced to the bliss of pardoned guilt; he is restored to the favour of that Great Being, whose smile is life, and lights up heaven with joy; whose frown is death, and fills all hell with wo. But I cannot describe these privileges in such brilliant language as has been employed by a transatlantic author:—"Regeneration is of the highest importance to man, as a subject of the divine government. With his former disposition he was a rebel against God, and with this he becomes cheerfully an obedient subject. Of an enemy he becomes a friend; of an apostate he becomes a child.

* See more on this subject in the chapter on the Temporal Advantages of Piety.

From the debased, hateful, miserable character of sin, he makes a final escape, and begins the glorious and eternal career of virtue. With his *character* his destination is equally changed; in his native condition he was a child of wrath, an object of abhorrence, and an heir of wo. Evil, in an unceasing, and interminable progress, was his lot; the regions of sorrow and despair his everlasting home; and fiends and fiend-like men his eternal companions. On his character good beings looked with detestation, and on his ruin with pity; while evil beings beheld both with that satanic pleasure, which a reprobate mind can enjoy at the sight of companionship in turpitude and destruction.

"But when he becomes a subject of this great and happy change of character, all things connected with him are also changed. His unbelief, impenitence, hatred of God, rejection of Christ, and resistance of the Spirit of Grace, he has voluntarily and ingenuously renounced; no more rebellious, impious or ungrateful, he has assumed the amiable spirit of submission, repentance, confidence, hope, gratitude, and love. The image of his Maker is enstamped upon his mind, and begins there to shine with moral and eternal beauty. The seeds of immortality have there sprung up, as in a kindly soil; and warmed by the life-giving beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and refreshed by the dewy influence of the Spirit of Grace, rise, and bloom and flourish, with increasing vigour. In him sin and the world and the flesh daily decay, and daily announce their approaching dissolution; while the soul continually assumes new life and virtue, and is animated with superior and undying

energy. He is now a joint heir with Christ, and the destined inhabitant of heaven; the gates of glory and of happiness are already opened to receive him, and the joy of saints and angels has been renewed over his repentance; all around him is peace—all before him purity and transport. God is his Father; Christ his Redeemer; and the Spirit of truth his Sanctifier. Heaven is his eternal habitation; virtue is his immortal character; and cherubim and seraphim and all the children of light, are his companions for ever. Henceforth he becomes of course a rich blessing to the universe; all good beings, nay, God himself, will rejoice in him for ever, as a valuable accession to the great kingdom of righteousness, as a real addition to the mass of created good, and as an humble, but faithful and honourable instrument of the everlasting praise of heaven. He is a vessel of infinite mercy; an illustrious trophy of the cross; a gem in the crown of glory, which adorns the Redeemer of mankind."*

Who, my children, can read this animated description of the privileges of true piety (and it is not an exaggerated account) without secretly longing to be a child of God? What are all the brightest distinctions of an earthly nature, after which envy pines in secret, or ambition rages in public, compared with this? Crowns are splendid baubles, gold is sordid dust, and all the gratifications of sense but vanity and vexation of spirit, when weighed against such splendid immunities as these.

5. Consider *the consolations it imparts.*

* Dwight's Sermon on Regeneration.

Our world has been called, in the language of poetry, a vale of tears, and human life a bubble, raised from those tears, and inflated by sighs, which, after floating a little while, decked with a few gaudy colours, is touched by the hand of death, and dissolves. Poverty, disease, misfortune, unkindness, inconstancy, death, all assail the travellers as they journey onward to eternity through this gloomy valley; and what is to comfort them but *religion?*

The consolations of religion are neither few nor small; they arise in part from those things which we have already mentioned in this chapter; *i. e.* from the exercise of the understanding on the revealed truths of God's word, from the impulses of the spiritual life within us, and from a reflection upon our spiritual privileges: but there are some others, which, though partially implied in these things, deserve a special enumeration and distinct consideration.

A good conscience, which the wise man says is a perpetual feast, sustains a high place amongst the comforts of genuine piety. It is unquestionably true, that a man's happiness is in the keeping of his conscience; all the sources of his felicity are under the command of this faculty. "A wounded spirit who can bear?" A troubled conscience converts a paradise into a hell, for it is the flame of hell kindled on earth; but a quiet conscience would illuminate the horrors of the deepest dungeon with the beams of heavenly day; the former has often rendered men like tormented fiends amidst an elysium of delights, while the latter has taught the songs of cherubim to martyrs in the prison or the flames. Religion furnishes a good conscience; by faith in

the blood of Christ it takes away guilt towards God, and by a holy life it keeps the conscience clear towards man. It first makes it good by justification, and then keeps it good by sanctification. What trouble may not a man bear beneath the smiles of an approving conscience! If this be calm and serene, the storms of affliction, which rage without, can as little disturb the comfort of the mind, as the fury of the wintry tempest can do, to alarm the inhabitants of a well-built, well-stored mansion.

In addition to this, religion comforts the mind, with *the assurance of an all-wise, all-pervading Providence*, so minute in its superintendence and control, that not a sparrow falls to the ground without the knowledge of our heavenly Father; a superintendence which is excluded from no point of space, no moment of time, and overlooks not the meanest creature in existence. Nor is this all; for the word of God assures the believer that "*all things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to his purpose.*" Nothing that imagination could conceive is more truly consolatory than this, to be assured that all things, however painful at the time, not excepting the failure of our favourite schemes, the disappointment of our fondest hopes, the loss of our dearest comforts, shall be overruled by infinite wisdom for the promotion of our ultimate good. This is a spring of comfort whose waters never fail.

Religion consoles also *by making manifest some of the benefits of affliction, even at the time it is endured.* It crucifies the world, mortifies sin, quickens prayer, extracts the balmy sweets

of the promises, endears the Saviour; and to crown all, *it directs the mind to that glorious state, where the days of our mourning shall be ended:* that happy country where God shall wipe every tear from our eyes, and there shall be no more sorrow or crying. Nothing so composes the mind, and helps it bear the load of trouble which God may lay upon it, as the near prospect of its termination. Religion shows the weather-beaten mariner the haven of eternal repose, where no storms arise, and the sea is ever calm; it exhibits to the weary traveller the city of habitation, within whose walls he will find a pleasant home, rest from his labours, and friends to welcome his arrival: it discloses to the wounded warrior his native country, where the alarms of war, and the dangers of conflict, will be no more encountered, but undisturbed peace for ever reign. In that one word, HEAVEN, religion provides a balm for every wound, a cordial for every care.

Here then, is the pleasure of that wisdom which is from above; it is not only enjoyed in prosperity, but continues to refresh us, and most powerfully to refresh us, in adversity; a remark which will not apply to any other kind of pleasure.

In the hour of misfortune, when a man, once in happy circumstances, sits down, amidst the wreck of all his comforts, and sees nothing but the fragments of his fortune for his wife and family, what, in this storm of affliction, is to cheer him but religion; and this *can* do it, and enable him to say, "although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall

yield no meat; the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation!" What but *religion* can comfort the poor labourer in that gloomy season when times are bad, and work is scarce, and he hardly knows where to procure his next meal? What can comfort the suffering female in that long and dreadful season, when, wasting away in a deep decline, she lies, night after night, consumed by fever, and day after day, convulsed by coughing? Tell me what can send a ray of comfort to her dark scene of wo, or a drop of consolation to her parched and thirsting lips, but *religion?* And when the agonized parent, with a heart half broken by the conduct of a prodigal son, exclaims—"O! who can tell how sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child!" what, in that season of torture, can pour a drop of balm into the wounded spirit but *religion?* And when we occupy the bed side of a departing friend, "the dreadful post of observation darker every hour," what but *religion* can sustain the mind, and calm the tumult of the soul? what, but this, can enable us to bear with even tolerable composure, the pang of separation? And we too must die: and here is the excellence of piety; it follows us, where no other friend can follow us, down into the dark valley of the shadow of death, stands by us when the last hand has quitted its grasp, reserves its mightiest energies for that most awful conflict, presents to the eye of faith the visions of glory rising up beyond the sepulchre, and angels advancing to receive us from the hand of earthly

friends to bear us to the presence of a smiling God.

Other sources of pleasure are open only during the season of health and prosperity. Admitting that they were all which their most impassioned admirers contend for, what can balls, routs, plays, cards, do, in the season of sickness, misfortune, or death? Alas! alas! they exist then only in recollection, and the recollection of them is painful.

6. The pleasures of religion appear in *the graces it implants.*

"And now abideth these three, Faith, Hope, Charity."

Faith is the leading virtue of Christianity. To believe, in any case, where the report is welcome, and the evidence of its truth convincing, is a pleasing exercise of the mind; how much more so in this case, where the testimony to be believed is the glad tidings of salvation, and the evidence of its truth most entirely satisfactory? *Hope* is a most delightful exercise. The pleasures of Hope have formed a theme for the poet; and it is evident that these pleasures must be in proportion, to the importance of the object desired, and the grounds that exist to expect its accomplishment. What then must be the influence of that hope which is full of immortality, which has the glory of heaven for its object, and the truth of God for its basis! which, as it looks towards its horizon, sees the shadowy forms of eternal felicity, rising, expanding, brightening, and advancing, every moment. *Love* is a third virtue, implanted and cherished in the soul by religion. Need I describe the pleasures connected with a pure and virtuous affection? Re-

ligion is love—love of the purest and sublimest kind; this is its essence, all else but its earthly attire, which it throws off as Elijah did his mantle, when it ascends to the skies. The delight of love must be in proportion to the excellence of its object, and the strength of its own propensity towards that object. What then must be the pleasure of that love which has *God* as its object, and which consists in complacency in *his* glories, gratitude for his mercies, submission to his will, and the enjoyment of his favour! This is a heavenly feeling, which brings us into communion with angels, and anticipates on earth the enjoyments of eternity. Submission, patience, meekness, gentleness, justice, compassion, zeal, are also among the graces which true religion implants in the human soul; which, like lovely flowers, adorn it with indescribable beauty, and refresh it with the most delicious fragrance.

7. Consider the *duties which religion enjoins*, and you will find in each of these a spring of hallowed pleasure.

How delightful an exercise is *prayer!* "Prayer is the peace of our spirit, the stillness of our thoughts, the evenness of recollection, the seat of meditation, the rest of our cares, and the calm of our tempests; it is the daughter of charity, and the sister of meekness." It is pleasant to tell our sorrows to any one; how much more to him who is omnipotent in power, infallible in wisdom, and infinite in compassion! With prayer is connected *praise*, that elevated action of the soul, in which she seems at the time to be learning motion and melody from an angel. How pleasant an exercise is the *perusal of the scriptures!* In prayer we speak to God, and in

the Bible God speaks to us, and both confer upon us honour indescribable. Passing by the antiquity of its history, the pathos of its narratives, the beauty of its imagery, how sublime are its doctrines, how precious its promises, how free its invitations, how salutary its warnings, how intense its devotions! "Precious Bible! when weighed against thee, all other books are but as the small dust of the balance." Nor less pleasant is *the holy remembrance of the Sabbath.* "I was glad," exclaims the Christian, "when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord:" and there, when standing within the gates of Zion, surrounded with the multitude that keep holy day, he repeats, amidst the years of his manhood, the song of his childhood, and from the fulness of his joy, he exclaims—

> "Lord, how delightful 'tis to see
> A whole assembly worship thee;
> At once they sing, at once they pray,
> They hear of heaven, and learn the way."

The sweetly-solemn engagements of *the sacramental feast;* the flow of brotherly love, called forth by *social prayer*, together with the *ardour of benevolence*, inspired by the support of public religious institutions; in these exercises is true happiness to be found, if indeed it is to be found any where on earth.

8. As a last proof of the pleasures derived from religion, I may appeal to *the experience of its friends.* Here the evidences accumulate by myriads on earth, and millions in heaven. Who that ever felt its influence, will doubt its tendency to produce delight? Go, go, my children,

to the saints of the most high God, and collect *their* testimony, and you shall be convinced "that light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." Go not to the christian of *doubtful* character, for he has only just religion enough to make him miserable; go to the most holy, and you shall find *them* the most happy.

And then there are also two or three other circumstances which are connected with the pleasures of religion that deserve attention. *It is pleasure that never satiates or wearies.* Can the epicure, the voluptuary, the drunkard, the ball-frequenter, say this of *their* delights? "How short is the interval, how easy the transition, between a pleasure and a burden. If sport refreshes a man when he is weary, it also wearies when he is refreshed. The most devoted pleasure-hunter in existence, were he bound to his sensual delights every day, would find it an intolerable burden, and fly to the spade and the mattock for a diversion from the misery of an unintermitted pleasure. Custom may render continued labour tolerable, but not continued pleasure. All pleasures that affect the body must needs weary, because they transport; and all transportation is violence; and no violence can be lasting, but determines upon the falling of the spirits, which are not able to keep up that height of motion, that the pleasure of the sense raises them to: and therefore how generally does an immoderate laughter end in a sigh, which is only nature's recovering herself after a force done to it; but the religious pleasure of a well-disposed mind moves gently, and therefore constantly; it does not affect by rapture and

ecstacy, but is like the pleasure of health, which is still and sober, yet greater and stronger than those which call up the senses with grosser and more affecting impressions."

And as all the grosser pleasures of sense weary, and all the sports and recreations soon pall upon the appetite, so, under some circumstances, do the more elevated enjoyments of exalted rank, agreeable company, and lively conversation; it is religion alone that preserves an unfading freshness, an undying charm, an inexhaustible power to please; it is this alone of all our pleasures which never cloys, never surfeits, but increases the appetite the more it gratifies it, and leaves it, after the richest feast, prepared and hungry for a still more splendid banquet.

And then another ennobling property of the pleasure that arises from religion, is *that as the sources and the seat of it are in a man's own breast, it is not in the power of any thing without him to destroy it, or take it away.* Upon God alone is he dependent for its enjoyment. Upon how many other agents, and upon what numerous contingencies, over which he can exercise no control, is the votary of worldly pleasure dependent for *his* bliss. How many things which he cannot command, are necessary to make up the machinery of his schemes. What trifles may disappoint him of his expected gratification, or rob him of his promised delights. A variable atmosphere, or a human mind, no less variable; a want of punctuality in others, or a want of health in himself: these, and a thousand other things, might be enumerated as circumstances, upon the mercy of each one of which the enjoyment of worldly pleasure depends.

"But the good man shall be satisfied from himself." "Whoever shall drink of the water that I shall give him," said Jesus Christ, "shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be *in him* a well of water springing up into everlasting life." The piety of his heart, produced by the Holy Ghost, is this well-spring of pleasure, which a good man carries every where with him, wherever he goes. He is independent of all the contingencies of life for his bliss. "It is an easy and a portable pleasure, such an one as he carries about in his bosom, without alarming the eye or the envy of the world. A man putting all his pleasures into this one, is like a traveller putting all his goods, as it were, into one jewel; the value is the same, and the convenience greater."

"Nor is this kind of pleasure out of the reach of any outward violence only; but even those things also, which make a closer impression upon us, which are the irresistible decays of nature, have yet no influence at all upon this. For when age itself, which of all things in the world will not be baffled or defied, shall begin to arrest, seize, and remind us of our mortality, by pains, aches, and deadness of limbs, and dulness of senses, yet then the pleasure of the mind shall be in its full youth, vigour, and freshness. A palsy may as soon shake an oak, or a fever dry up a fountain, as either of them shake, dry up, or impair the delight of conscience; for it lies within, it centres in the heart, it grows into the very substance of the soul, so that it accompanies a man to his grave; he never outlives it, and that for this cause only, because he cannot outlive himself."

How comes it to pass then, that in opposition to all this, the opinion has gained ground that religion leads to melancholy? *The irreligious judge of it by their own feelings;* and as *they* are not conscious of any pleasurable emotions, excited by sacred things, they conclude that others are in like manner destitute of them. But is *their* testimony to be received, before that of the individual who has tried and found it by experience to be bliss? Again, irreligious people form their opinion *by what they see in many professors,* some of whom, though professing godliness, are destitute of its power; and being more actuated by a spirit of the world than of piety, are strangers to the peace that passeth understanding; others are not yet brought out of that deep dejection, with which the earlier stages of conviction are sometimes attended. The sinner, when first arrested in his thoughtless career, is filled with deep dismay, and the most poignant grief; reviewed in this state of mind, his appearance may produce the idea that religion is the parent of melancholy. But wait, he that sows in tears shall reap in joy. His tears, like showers in summer from a dark and lowering cloud, carry off the gloom which they first caused, portend a clearer and a cooler atmosphere, and are ultimately followed by the bright shining of the sun.

An unfavourable impression against religion is sometimes produced by *the constitutional gloom* of some of its genuine disciples. It should be recollected, that in these cases, religion does not cause the dejection, for this would have existed had there been no piety. All that can be said is, that it does not cure it, which is

not to be expected, unless piety pretended to exert an influence over the physical nature of man.

The supposition that piety leads to melancholy is also founded, in part, *on the self-denying duties which the word of God enjoins.* Penitence, self-denial, renunciation of the world, willingness to take up the cross, and follow after Christ, are unquestionably required, and must be truly found in the genuine christian. Hence, the worldling thinks it impossible, but that with such duties, should be associated the most sullen and miserable state of mind. Little does he imagine, that the pleasures which religion has to offer for those she requires us to abandon, are like the orb of day to the glow-worm of the hedge, or the meteor of the swamp; and that for every moment's self-denial she requires us to endure, she has a million ages of ineffable delight to bestow.

"And now upon the result of all, I suppose that to exhort men to be religious, is only in other words to exhort them to take their pleasure—a pleasure, high, rational, and angelical—a pleasure embased with no appendant sting, no consequent loathing, no remorses or bitter farewells: but such an one, as being honey in the mouth, never turns to gall in the belly: a pleasure made for the soul and the soul for that; suitable to its spirituality and equal to its capacities: such an one as grows fresher upon enjoyment, and though continually fed upon, is never devoured: a pleasure that a man may call as properly his own, as his soul and his conscience; neither liable to accident, nor exposed to injury; it is the foretaste of heaven,

and the earnest of eternity: in a word, it is such an one as being begun in grace, passes into glory, blessedness, and immortality; and those joys that neither eye hath seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man to conceive!"*

CHAPTER XI.

On the advantages of early piety.

A QUAINT but eminently spiritual poet of the last century has a poem, entitled, "Strife in Heaven:" a singular idea to attach to that region of untroubled repose. The design of the piece, however, is ingenious and interesting. A company of the redeemed above are represented as discussing, in a spirit of perfect love, the question, "which of them was most indebted to divine grace for his salvation?" Amongst these grateful and holy litigants, two appeared to have claims for the greatest weight of obligation to sovereign mercy, so nearly balanced, as to render it difficult to say which owed most. One was a glorified spirit, converted in old age, after a long life of sin; the other was a saint

* This and the other quotations are from Dr. South's sermon on Prov. iii. 7, which is so striking that I could not avoid giving these extracts from it.

See also an excellent volume of sermons, by the Rev. H. F. Burder, on the Pleasures of Religion.

redeemed in youth, and who spent as long a life in holiness. The one contended, that his forgiveness, after such a lengthened course of vice and destructive conduct, made him the greatest monument of saving love in heaven; "except," exclaimed the other, "myself; who, by divine grace, was prevented from that course of sin, and was enabled by religion to spend my years in holiness and usefulness." I think the happy throng must have confessed the justice of the younger seraph's claim; Omniscient wisdom from the throne must have confirmed their judgement; and in heaven it must have been decided, that *they* owe most to sovereign grace, who have been called by its power to the service of God in their youth.

Youth is a season which presents peculiar advantages for the *pursuit* of piety.

It is attended, in general, with more leisure, and less care, than any subsequent period of life. As yet, my children, you are not entangled in the concerns of business, nor the cares of a family. The ten thousand tumultuous anxieties of a father or a mother, a master or a mistress, do not yet fill your minds, and exclude all other topics. Tell us, ye fathers, struggling with the difficulties of a precarious trade; and ye mothers, absorbed in the duties of a rising family; which, think ye, is the best time to begin the pursuit of eternal life? With tears they respond, "Seize! O seize, young people, the halcyon days of youth!"

Youth is a season of *greater susceptibility of mind* than any which follows it.

In the spring-time of nature, the soil is better prepared for the reception of the seed, and the energies of vegetation are more vigorous; so it is with the mind. In youth the heart is more easily impressed, the affections more readily moved, the imagination is more lively. You have an ardour and fervency most remote from the timid, hesitating caution of age, and eminently favourable to conversion. Disdaining all resistance, ambitious of great achievements, full of high resolves, and leaping over opposing obstacles, youth surveys, with sparkling eyes, the crown of its wishes, braces itself for action, and flies to the goal; whilst age, creeping fearfully along, afraid of every difficulty, discouraged by the least resistance, can scarcely be impelled to move. I know that these things of themselves are not sufficient to make you holy; but when grace sanctifies them, and directs them to proper objects, they must render your entrance on religion more easy, your progress more rapid, and your enjoyment more strong.

Youth are *less hardened in sin*, than persons of riper years.

The depravity of our nature grows with our growth, and strengthens with our strength. Like a tree, it strikes its roots deeper, and takes a faster hold on the soil every year. You have principles of corruption already in your hearts, my children, but they have not, by long indulgence, become so stiffened into habit, as they will be at some future time. Your prejudices and prepossessions are yet few and feeble. As yet the sentiments of modesty and propriety, and a regard to the opinion of others, would make you blush for acts of vice, and endeavour to

conceal them from the world. In riper years you will assume a boldness in iniquity, disregard the censures of others, and cease to be restrained by them. Conscience has not yet been deeply corrupted; it still preserves something of its tremulous delicacy, and nice sensibility; it still elevates its warning voice, and strongly remonstrates at your least deviation from the path of virtue; but in the aged sinner, weary of useless reproof, it is almost silent, or totally disregarded. We know that without divine grace, conversion, even in your case, cannot take place; but we know, at the same time, by observation, that divine grace very often follows in the order of nature.

Youth are *pre-eminently encouraged to seek the possession and influence of piety.*

There are many invitations, promises, and injunctions, specially addressed to them. "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth. I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me." Under the Jewish dispensation, God called for the *first-fruits* of all things, intending, no doubt, to teach, amongst other lessons, his delight in the dedication of the first-fruits of our life to his service. How pleased was the Redeemer with the hosannas of the children, and how deeply was he interested in the case of that hopeful youth, who came to inquire of him the way to life. And does not the parable of the Prodigal Son teach us how welcome is the return of the young to the Father of Mercies? God chose David, the youngest son of the family; and set his love upon Jacob, while Esau the elder is passed by. He accepted the sacrifice of Abel, the younger

brother, while that of Cain is rejected. Amongst all the disciples, John was the most beloved, and he was, at the same time, the youngest.

But still the principal design of this chapter is to set forth the advantages attendant on the *possession* of early piety.

1. Of these some relate to *others*. This will cause you to be a source of ineffable delight to your parents;* and probably render you a blessing to your brothers and sisters. Piety in youth will render you a benefactor to your species, and a blessing to society. Instead of seducing others by a bad example, you will benefit them by the influence of a good one; instead of poisoning others by corrupt principles, you will scatter along your path the seed of truth, piety, and morality; instead of drawing down the vengeance of God upon society by your crimes, you will bring down his blessing by your prayers.

* In the memoirs of that truly apostolic missionary, the Rev. Henry Martyn, occurs the following anecdote, which most forcibly illustrates the subject of the influence of filial conduct upon parental and domestic comfort and respectability:—

"Visited the hospital this day, and read the eleventh chapter of John to a poor man, in whose room, at the workhouse, I was struck with the misery that presented itself. He was lying with his clothes and hat on, upon the bed, dying. His wife was cleaning the room, as if nothing was the matter; and upon the threshold was the daughter, about thirty years old, who had been delirious thirteen years." What a scene of wretchedness! What a miserable group! It is a picture from which the mind turns with the deepest emotions of distressful pity. But, oh! the cause of this misery!! "The dying man," continues Mr. Martyn, "was once a respectable innkeeper in the town; *but the extravagance of a son* brought him to poverty, and a daughter, who foresaw it, to insanity." What must be the feelings (except, indeed, vice had turned his heart to stone) of the guilty author of this complicated misery, when he saw the consuming grief of his broken-hearted father, and heard the wild ramblings of his maniac sister, while conscience thundered in his ear, "Thou art the cause of this dreadful calamity!!" How many broken hearts and insane minds has similar conduct produced? How many are at this moment bending to the grave, or shut up in the cells of a lunatic asylum, who, but for prodigate children, might have been living in health, sanity and respectability!!

You will be a patriot of the most elevated and successful nature; and by your good conduct, and the support of all religious institutions, do more for the good of your country than fleets and armies can achieve.

2. Innumerable advantages will result from early piety to *yourself.*

It will exert a friendly influence over your temporal interests.* It will open *springs of consolation* all along your path through the vale of tears, whose waters, adapted to every condition, shall never fail. Religion, chosen in youth as your guide, companion, and friend, will attend you through all the journey of life; will go with you where you go, and dwell with you wherever you dwell: she will accompany you when with many tears you quit the parental roof, and go forth, a young adventurer, into the world. She will travel with you in the wilderness, or sail with you on the ocean; she will abide with you in a mansion, or inhabit with you the cottage: when every other friend forsakes you, she will cling to you the closer; smile, when every other face is covered with a frown; and put forth all her energies to comfort you in the time of your humbled fortunes; in seasons of perplexity, she will guide you to the fountain of light: when oppressed with care, will place you on the rock of ages; in the storms of affliction, will cast for you the anchor of hope; and in times of dreary desolation, will enable you, by faith, to see the land which is afar off, the land of promise and of rest.

* See the chapter on this subject.

Early piety is *a distinguished honour.*

If there be true honour in the universe, it is to be found in religion. Even the heathen were sensible of this; hence the Romans built the temples of virtue and honour close together, to teach that the way to honour was by virtue. Religion is the image of God in the soul of man. Can glory itself rise higher than this? What a distinction! to have *this* lustre put upon the character in youth. It was mentioned by Paul as a singular honour to the believing Jews, that they first trusted in Christ; and in referring to Andronicus and Junia, he mentions it to their praise that they were in Christ before him. To be a child of God, an heir of glory, a disciple of Christ, a warrior of the cross, a citizen of the New Jerusalem, from our youth up, adorns the brow with amaranthine wreaths of fame. A person converted in youth, is like the sun rising on a summer's morning to shine through a long bright day; but a person converted late in life, is like the evening star, a lovely object of christian contemplation, but not appearing till the day is closing, and then but for a little while.

Early piety *will be of immense importance to you in the various relations of life in which you may stand.*

If you are parents, it will dispose and enable you to train up your children and servants in the fear of God. It will prevent you from neglecting the immortal interests of those who are committed to your care. How many parents are accessary to the murder of their children's souls; blood-guiltiness rests upon their conscience, and the execrations of their own offspring

will be upon them through eternity. In those cases where persons are redeemed late in life, what anguish is sometimes felt on seeing their children wandering in the broad road that leadeth to destruction; and on remembering that they were the means of leading them astray. "Oh, my children! my children!" they exclaim, "would God I had known religion earlier for your sakes. Why did I not seek the Lord in youth! Then I should have trained you up in the fear of God, and have been spared the agony of seeing you walking in the path of destruction; or, at least, have been spared the torturing reflection, that it was through my neglect you despised religion."

Early piety, will be *a guard to you against the temptations to which we are all exposed in this life.*

Temptation to sin, like the wind, comes from every quarter in this world. In company, in solitude; at home, abroad; in God's house and in our own; we are always open to attack. Business, pleasure, companions, all may become a snare. We never know when, or from what, or in what way to expect the assault. At one time we may be tempted to infidelity, at another to immorality; now to licentiousness, then to intemperance. Piety is the only effectual guard of our character. Luther tells us of a young believer who used to repel all temptations with this exclamation, "Begone, I am a Christian." My children, adopt the same character, and maintain it with the same constancy and success. When Pyrrhus tempted Fabricius, the first day with an elephant, and the next with promises of honour, the Roman nobly replied, "I fear not

thy force; I am too wise for thy fraud." Religion will enable you to say the same to every one who threatens or allures. Neglect piety in youth, and who shall say how low in the scale of vice and infamy you may be found in after life? Omit to take with you this shield, and your moral character may be destroyed, or receive a wound, the scar of which you may carry to the grave.

Early piety *will thus leave you fewer sins to bewail in after life.*

Amongst other things which the illustrious Beza gave thanks for to God in his last will and testament, was this, that he became a real christian at the age of sixteen, by which he was prevented from the commission of many sins, which would otherwise have overtaken him, and rendered his life less happy. Every year's impenitence, must cause many years' repentance. If you neglect religion in youth, God may give you up to the delusions of infidelity, or the practices of immorality; and during this unhappy season, of what remediless mischief may you be the occasion. How many companions may you lead astray by your crimes; who, admitting that you are afterwards reclaimed by grace, are not so easily led back by your virtues. Instances have occurred in which young men, during the days of their irreligion, have perpetrated the horrid crime of corrupting female virtue, and then abandoned the hapless victim of their passion. Cast off as a guilty, worthless thing, the injured partner of his sins has added iniquity to iniquity, and she, who but for her betrayer might have lived a long and virtuous life, has sunk amidst disease, and want,

and infamy, to an early and dishonoured grave. God, in the mysteries of his grace, has in after years given repentance to the greater criminal of the two. But can *he* forget his crime?—Oh, no. God has forgiven him, but never, never can he forgive himself. Not even the blood which has washed away the guilt from his conscience, can efface the history of it from the page of memory; nor floods of tears deaden the impression which it has left upon the heart. He cannot restore the virtue he destroyed, nor refund the peace which with felon hand he stole from the bosom tranquil till it knew him;—he cannot build up the character he demolished, much less can he rekindle the life which he extinguished; or call back from the regions of the damned, the miserable ghost which he hurried to perdition. Ah! that ghost now haunts his imagination, and, as she exhibits the mingled agony, fury, revenge, and despair of a lost soul, seems to say, "Look at me, my destroyer!" For awhile he can see nothing but her flames, and hear nothing but her groans.

Early religion would have saved him from all this. Late piety brings him salvation for another world, but it comes not soon enough to save him from remorse in this.

Early piety will procure for you, if you live so long, *the honour of an aged disciple.*

A person converted late in life, is a young disciple, though a gray-headed man. An aged hero, who has spent his days contending for the liberties of his country, or a philosopher, who has long employed himself in improving its science, or a philanthropist, who has become gray in relieving its wants, are venerable sights,

but far inferior, if they are destitute of religion, to the aged Christian who has employed half a century in glorifying God, as well as doing good to man. An old disciple is honoured in the church, and respected even in the world. His hoary head is lifted like a crown of glory among other and younger disciples, over whom his decaying form throws its venerated shade. How rich is he in experience of all the ways of godliness. Like a decrepid warrior, he can talk of conflicts and of victories. Younger Christians gather round him to learn wisdom from his lips, and courage from his feats, and to show him tokens of respect. By his brethren in Christ he is regarded with veneration; his presence is always marked with every demonstration of respect, and his opinion is listened to with the profoundest deference. He is consulted in emergencies, and the fruits of his experience are gathered with eagerness. His virtues have been tried by time, the surest test of excellence, and they have passed with honour the ordeal. That suspicion and skepticism, which innumerable moral failures have produced in some minds, as to the reality of religion in general, and the sincerity of any of its professors, retire from the presence of such a man, convinced of the injustice of its surmises; and even the infidel and profane, bear a testimony to his worth, which his long tried consistency has extorted. "There, at least," say they, "is one good man, whose sincerity has been tried by the fluctuating circumstances and varying situations of half a century. His is no mushroom piety which springs up in a night, and perishes in a day. The suns of many summers, and the storms of

many winters, have passed over it; and both adversity and prosperity have assailed, and demonstrated its stability. We begin, after all, from that very character, to believe that there is more in religion than we have been apt to imagine."

Early piety, if persisted in, *prepares for a comfortable old age.* The condition of an old man without piety, is wretched indeed. He presents to the eye of Christian contemplation a melancholy spectacle. As to all the grand purposes of existence, he has passed through the world in vain. Life to him has been a lost adventure. Seventy years he has sojourned in the region of mercy, and is going out of it without salvation. Seventy years he has dwelt within reach of redemption, and yet is going to the lost souls in prison. If he is insensible to his case, he is going to ruin asleep; but if a little awakened, how bitter are his reflections. If he looks back upon the past, he sees nothing but a wide and dreary waste, where the eye is relieved by no monuments of piety, but scared by memorials of a life of sin; if he looks at his present circumstances, he sees nothing but a mere wreck of himself, driving upon the rock of his destiny and destruction: but the future! oh, how can he look on that which presents to him death, for which he is not prepared; judgement, from which he can expect nothing but condemnation; heaven, which he has bartered for pleasures, the remembrance of which is now painful, or insipid; hell, which he has merited, with its eternity of torments, by his iniquities. The ghosts of spent years, and departed joys, flit before him, and point to those regions of wo,

whither sinful delights conduct the sensualist and voluptuary. Miserable old man! the winter of life is upon him, and he has nothing to cheer his cold and dreary spirit; nor any spring to look forward to: the *night* of existence has come on; not a star twinkles from heaven upon his path; nor will any morning dawn upon the gloom which enwraps him. Such is the old age of those who remember not God in their youth, and carry on their oblivion of religion, as such persons generally do, to the end of life.

But should any one be called at the eleventh hour, such a convert will be subject, at times, to the most painful doubts and apprehensions; he questions the reality of his religion; he fears that it is the result of circumstances, not of a divine change; he is afraid that, like a half-shipwrecked vessel, driven into port by the violence of the storm, rather than by the effort of the crew, he has been forced to religion more by the terrors produced by approaching death than the choice of his own will; he often concludes that he never forsook the world till he could no longer retain it; and that he renounced the enjoyments of earth only because from the decay of his body, from the feebleness of his mind, and the weakness of his fancy, he is unable to indulge in them. These, and other similar fears, generally occasion, in persons converted in old age, a painful hesitancy concerning the security of their state; prevent them from going on their way rejoicing, and hang like a cloud upon the prospect of immortality.

How much more cheering and consolatory are the reflections of the aged Christian, who remembered his Creator in the days of his

youth. He too has arrived at the wintry days of existence, but like the inhabitant of a well-stored mansion, he has a thousand comforts which enable him to hear the howling of the tempest without a fear, and to look on the dreariness of the scene unconscious of a want; and then, in addition to this, the days of everlasting spring approach. He, too, is overtaken by the evening; his shadow lengthens on the plain, but the heavens pour upon him the glory of God, while the word in which he trusted is a lamp unto his feet; and an eternal day is about to dawn upon his soul. In the past he sees the long interval between the season of youth and the furrowed countenance of age, filled up in some good degree, with works of devotion, righteousness, and benevolence; whereby he has glorified God, benefited his species, and prepared a balm for his memory. No sins of youth fill his bones with pain, or his spirit with remorse. He has little doubt of his sincerity; for his life, though it affords him no ground of dependence for salvation, furnishes him with numerous evidences of the faith which justifies the soul, and purifies the heart. He forsook the world when most capable of enjoying it; he was not driven by violence to religion, but deliberately weighed anchor, and, with every sail set, steered for the haven of piety. He has resisted innumerable attacks upon his principles, and against every foe has held fast his integrity. On the verge of life he can say, "I have kept the faith, I have fought a good fight, I have nearly finished my course; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of life, which God the righteous Judge will bestow upon me."

Surely, surely my children, an old age thus placid and venerable, is an object worthy of your desires; surely these peaceful recollections, these sublime prospects, amidst the dreariness of age, are deserving your exertions.

Early piety *will have a considerable influence on your eternal felicity.*

In dwelling upon the two different and contrary states of heaven and hell, we are not to conceive of them as conditions of being, where all persons in the former will be equally happy, and all in the latter equally miserable. There are different degrees of glory in one, and different degrees of torment in the other. This is proved by scripture, and accords with reason. Grace is glory in the bud; glory is grace in a state of fructification; and as in the natural world, so it is in the spiritual one, where there is little blossom, there cannot be much fruit. Life is the seedtime for eternity; what a man soweth, that shall he also reap, not only in kind, but degree. Late sowings, as well as scanty ones, are generally followed with short crops. The reward of the righteous is all of grace, but then that grace which rewards the righteous rather than the wicked, may, with equal consistency, reward righteousness according to its degrees. We cannot think that the reward of the dying thief, who was converted in the dark valley of the shadow of death, will be equal to that of Timothy or of Paul, who spent a long and laborious life in the service of Christ. Nor is it to be imagined, that the crown of the aged convert will be as bright or as heavy, as that of the Christian who is converted in youth, and

continues, till a good old age, in a course of consistent piety.

But there is one consideration which should come home to the bosom of young people with overwhelming force: I mean, *that unless they become partakers of piety in early life, the probability is, that they will never partake of it at all.* Is it of consequence, that you should become pious at *any* time? then does all that consequence attach to the *present* time? Let me sound this idea again and again in your ears, let me detain your attention upon the awful and alarming sentiment. The probability of your salvation becomes weaker and weaker as the years of youth roll by. It is less probable this year than the last, and will be less probable next year than this. I do not now argue upon the uncertainty of life, *that* I have considered before; *I appeal to* FACTS, which in reference to the sentiment I have now advanced, are of the most alarming aspect. Consider only two individuals of the six hundred thousand, who left Egypt above the age of twenty years, enter Canaan. Of those who are converted at all, by far the greater part are brought to seek religion in their youth; and of the few who are reclaimed in adult, or old age, how rare a case is it, to find one who has been religiously educated. It is easy to observe, generally speaking, that sinners who have been brought under the means of grace, or under some new and impressive preaching, which they never enjoyed before, if they do not *soon* profit by their privileges, rarely profit by them at all. God's time of conversion seems to be, the morning of religious privilege. The churches mentioned in the New

Testament, were chiefly made up of persons converted by the *first* efforts of the apostles. Hence, when these servants of the cross were unsuccessful in their *early* labours in a city, or province, they looked upon it as a bad omen, and as a strong indication that it would be useless to continue their ministrations there;* so that the usual order of divine grace is, for its showers to fall on what might be called morning sowings. The seasons of youthful years, or youthful means, are the usual times of conversion; and those who misimprove either of these, are in general found to neglect religion for ever after.

I am aware, that instances to the contrary are *sometimes* found; and therefore none who are inclined to seek God at any age should despair: yet they but rarely occur, and therefore let none presume. True repentance is never too late; but late repentance is seldom produced.

It is very probable, that some who shall read these pages, deliberately and sincerely make up their mind to serve God at some future time, after they have a little longer enjoyed the world. Mistaken youth! Sinful young people! Let them consider what their intentions amount to; "I will go on sinning a little longer, and then I will repent. I will serve Satan, and the world, and sin, as long as I can, and when I am worn out in their service, or weary of it, I will turn to God and try the ways of religion. O Lord! the preserver of my days, spare my life a little longer to disobey thee, to insult thee, and then give me thy grace to assist me to turn

* See Acts xiii. 46, 48; xxii. 18; xxviii. 23—28.

from my wicked ways and live." What wickedness! What shocking impiety! What daring madness! Do they not tremble? Are they not terrified at this view of their own conduct? Can they live another day in this state of mind? Can they give their eyes to sleep with such a purpose in their bosom? Let them consider how just it is that God should reserve the dregs of his wrath for those, who reserve only the dregs of their time for HIM.

Now, now, my children, is the accepted time, this is the day of salvation. "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." You know not what another day, hour, moment, may bring forth. Opportunity, mercy, salvation, heaven, eternal glory, are all upon the wing of the *present* hour; condemnation, hell, eternal torment and despair, may all be in the train of the *next*. That door of grace which is open to-day, may be shut to-morrow; that sceptre of mercy which is stretched out to-day, may be withdrawn to-morrow. Oh, the noble purposes that have withered, the sublime prospects that have failed, the millions of immortal souls that have perished by putting off the *present* season, for a more convenient time. "Soul opportunities," says an old author, "are more worth than a thousand worlds." And they are rapidly slipping by with the days of your youth.

CHAPTER XII.

On the Influence of Religion upon the Temporal Interests of its Professor.

GODLINESS has the promise of the life that is *to come;* it conducts to glory, honour, immortality: this is its chief commendation. Revelation has drawn aside the veil which hangs over the unseen state, and urged you, my children, upon the great business of religion, by a contemplation of the dark world of hell, and of the splendours of the celestial city. It might seem, that after such an appeal, every other were useless, and that to speak of other advantages than eternal life, were only adding a drop to the ocean, a taper to the sun: but there are persons who are wrought upon more by present good, however small, than any future prospect of the greatest gain; who are more governed by illustrations borrowed from things seen and temporal, than by those which are derived from things unseen and eternal. In *this* respect also, and on this ground, religion can plead its advantages, for it has "the promise of the life that *now* is," as well as that which is to come. I do not assert, that religion will conduct all its followers to wealth, honour, and health. No. Still, however, it exerts a friendly influence on all the temporal interests of mankind, and protects them from many evils to which, without it, they are exposed.

1. It exercises and improves the *understanding*.

From beginning to end, religion is an intellectual process. Whatever raises man above the dominion of the senses, and renders him independent of these, as sources of gratification, must have a salutary influence upon the mind. Now the objects which religion exhibits, are such as the mental faculties alone can converse with: and the moment a man begins to feel solicitude about spiritual things, he begins to experience a considerable elevation of character. And then the subjects of divine truth, are of the most sublime and lofty kind. They form the Alps in the world of mind. The existence and attributes of the great God; the system of Providence, embracing all worlds and all ages; the scheme of redemption, planned from eternity for the salvation of millions of rational creatures; the immortality of the soul; the solemnities of judgement; the everlasting states of the righteous and the wicked; these are the every-day topics of thought to a Christian. Can a man live in daily contemplation of these vast ideas, and not feel an elevating influence upon his understanding? It will probably be said, that science will have the same effect. This is admitted in part. But how many are there to whom philosophical pursuits are utterly inaccessible. Besides this, it might be replied that nothing but religion will infallibly guard the soul from being debased by vicious indulgencies.

Read the missionary records, and learn by these interesting details, what religion has done for the Negroes of the West Indies, the Hottentots of South Africa, the Esquimaux of Labrador,

the fur-clad Greenlanders of the arctic regions, and the voluptuous cannibals of the South Sea Islands. It has raised them from savages into rational creatures; it has awakened their dormant understanding; sharpened their powers of perception; taught them the art of reasoning; and invested them with the power of eloquence.

But why do I go to distant countries, while our own furnishes illustrations so numerous, and so striking? How many persons are there, who were educated in our Sunday schools, and who are now filling stations of importance, credit, and usefulness, who, but for religion, would never have risen in the scale of society, or ascended above the lowest level of poverty. Education, it is true gave the first impulse to their minds; but it was an impulse which would have soon spent its force, had it not been continued and increased by religion. It was this that gave the sober, serious, and reflective turn of mind which has led to such mental improvement: and they who, but for the power of godliness, would have been still earning their bread at the plow or the anvil, are filling the place of tradesmen or clerks; or are raised to the distinction of preaching with ability and success, the truths of salvation.*

* As a proof of the influence which religion has in strengthening and elevating the powers, of even the most cultivated understanding, I may give the following quotation from the Life of the Rev. Henry Martyn, a book which I most emphatically recommend to the perusal of all young people, as one of the most interesting publications that modern times have produced.

"Since I have known God in a saving manner," he remarks, "painting, poetry, and music, have had charms unknown to me before. I have received, what I suppose is a taste for them; for religion has refined my mind, and made it susceptible of impressions from the sublime and beautiful. O how religion secures the heightened enjoyment of those pleasures which keep so many from God, by their becoming a source of pride."

As it may be fairly argued that the sublimity of Milton's genius, was owing in no small degree to the influence of religion upon his mind.

2. Religion guards the *health*.

I do not mean to say that the rose will ever bloom upon the countenance of piety, but I will affirm, that where it already displays its beauty and sheds its fragrance, religion will prevent those vices, which, like worms at the root of a flower, consume its strength, and shorten its existence. How many diseases are generated by sin. It is calculated that even in a time of war, there are more who perish by drunkenness and licentiousness, than by the sword. "Ye victims of voluptuousness, ye martyrs of concupiscence, who formerly tasted the pleasures of sin for a season, but now are beginning to feel the horrors of it for ever; you serve us for demonstration and example. Look at those trembling hands, that shaking head, those disjointed knees, that faltering resolution, that feeble memory, that worn out body all putrefaction; these are the dreadful rewards which vice bestows now, as pledges of what Satan will bestow presently, on those on whom he is preparing to exhaust his fury." Religion will prevent all this; that passion which wastes the strength as with a fever; that ambition which wears out the frame faster than hard labour; that malice which robs of sleep; that gambling which hurries a man backward and forward between the delirium of hope and the torture of fear; that gluttony which brings on apoplexy; that drunkenness which preys as a slow fire on the organs of life; that debauchery which corrupts the whole mass of the blood, and brings

This is at once far more direct and obvious in its tendency, than any natural scenery, however bold and striking may be its features; since piety not only brings the mind into the region of sublime mental scenery but fixes the eye most intently upon it.

the infirmities of age on the days of youth: yes, religion keeps off all these vices and their consequences. "The fear of the Lord prolongeth days; it is a fountain of life to guard us from the snares of death." But of the drunkard and the fornicator it may be said, "His bones are full of the sins of his youth, which lie down with him in the dust. Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth; though he hide it under his tongue; though he spare it, and forsake it not, but keep it still within his mouth; yet his meat in his bowels is turned, it is the gall of asps within him."*

3. Religion builds up and protects the *reputation.*

It prevents those sins which render a man dishonourable and infamous: it promotes all those virtues which raise and cherish esteem. How much is the liar, the extortionate and imposing tradesman, the unfaithful servant, the unkind husband, the cruel oppressive master, despised. Who respects the individual who is notoriously addicted to vice, and flagrantly neglectful of the lowest obligations of virtue? Whereas a man of consistent piety, who is known to be a real Christian, and whose Christianity renders him scrupulously true, honest and upright, such a man is universally esteemed. The wicked may laugh at his piety, but is he not the very man with whom they love to trade; in whose character they find sufficient vouchers for the propriety of his conduct; and in whose fidelity they can repose unbounded confidence? This was remarkably exemplified in the instance of the missionary Schwartz, who laboured to spread the

* Job xx. 11—14.

Gospel in the southern part of the Indian peninsula. Such was the repute in which this holy man was held by the native princes of Hindostan, that when Tippoo Saib was about to enter into a treaty with the Company, not being disposed to place much confidence in their agents, he exclaimed, "Send to me the missionary Schwartz, and I will treat with him, for I *can* confide in *his* veracity."

How many persons has the want of religion brought to an untimely end! No man would ever have been exiled as a felon, or executed as a malefactor, if he had lived under the influence of piety. No jail would have been needed, no gallows erected, if all men were pious. Godliness may not indeed guard us from poverty, but it will certainly save us from infamy. It may not advance us to wealth, but it will assuredly raise us to respectability.

4. Religion promotes *our secular interests.*

I do not pretend that piety bears into the church the cornucopia of worldly wealth, to pour down showers of gold on all who court her smiles and bend to her sway; but still there is a striking tendency in her influence, to improve our worldly circumstances.

It certainly prevents *those vices which tend to poverty.* Penury is often the effect of vice. How many have hurled themselves and their families from the pinnacles of prosperity to the depths of adversity, by a course of wicked and profligate extravagance. Multitudes have spent all their substance, like the prodigal son, upon harlots and riotous living. Pride has ruined thousands, and indolence its tens of thousands. It is a quaint observation of an old writer, but

a very true one, that one vice costs more to keep it than two children." Religion is the most economical, and sin the most expensive thing in the world. How much do the drunkard, debauchee, sabbath-breaker, and frequenter of theatres, pay for their sinful gratifications. What is spent in this kingdom every year in the grosser sensual indulgencies, would pay the interest of the national debt. Piety would save all this to the kingdom.

And then it not only prevents the vices which tend to poverty, *but it enjoins and cherishes the virtues which lead to prosperity.* It makes a man industrious; and is not this the way to wealth? It renders him sober, and does not sobriety tend to advance our fortune? It enforces a right improvement of time, and surely this is advantageous to every one. It prescribes frugality, which tends to increase. If a young man is in the service of another, piety, by causing him to speak the truth, and adhere to the principles of honesty, renders him trust-worthy and confidential. Innumerable are the cases in which persons, who set out on the journey of life without property and without patronage, have, by dint of those virtues which religion enjoins, risen to respectability and affluence. They were first probably in a state of servitude, where, by their steadiness and good conduct, they so attached themselves to their employers, as to become in their estimation, almost essential to the future success of the business; and the result has been, a share, and, in some cases, the whole of the trade, which they had contributed so materially to establish.

A friend of mine was once walking in the neighbourhood of a large manufacturing town on a very cold winter's morning, when he overtook a plain man, decently clad, and wrapped in a comfortable great coat. After the usual salutations, my friend said to the stranger, "I am glad to see you with such a good warm covering this cold morning."—"It was not always thus," the man replied. "I was once a poor miserable creature, and had neither good clothes nor good victuals; now I have both, and a hundred pounds in the bank." "What produced this favourable change?" continued my friend. "Religion, Sir. I am a good workman, and, as is too commonly the case with such men, spent half my time, and all my wages nearly, at the public house. I was of course always poor, and always wretched. By God's direction I was led to hear the Methodists, when by divine grace, the word reached my heart. I repented of my sin, and became a new creature in Christ Jesus; old things passed away, and all things became new. Religion made me industrious and sober; nothing now went for sin; and the result is, that I am comfortable, and comparatively rich."

Here then is a proof and an illustration, that godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is as well as of that which is to come. Nor are these proofs uncommon. Many persons, now living in circumstances of high respectability, are willing to ascribe all they possess here, as well as all they hope for hereafter, to the influence of religion.

All this is seen in the case of individuals: but if the subject be carried out to society at large, it will appear still more striking.

What but religion can raise men from a savage to a civilized state? What else could have achieved the wonders which have been wrought in Africa, in Otaheite; and taught the rudest barbarians to till the ground, to learn trades, to clothe themselves in decent apparel, to read, to cast accounts, to print books, to frame laws?

Godliness alone can expel from society the practice of cruelty, and introduce the reign and prevalence of mercy. The dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty. Rome and Greece, in the zenith of their glory, had neither a hospital for the sick, nor an asylum for the poor: they treated their enemies with the most insolent cruelty; practised the most rigorous slavery; instituted games, in which myriads of human beings were torn to pieces in fighting with wild beasts. What a blessing has Christianity been to the world, even in relation to its present comforts. It has suppressed polygamy, put a stop to the sale of children by their parents, and the abandonment and murder of aged parents by their children; it has rescued women from their abominable degradation by the other sex, and raised them to their just rank in society; it has sanctified the bond of marriage, checked the licentiousness of divorce; it has in a great measure destroyed slavery, mitigated the terrors of war, given a new sanction to treaties, introduced milder laws, and more equitable governments; it has taught lenity to enemies, and hospitality to strangers; it has made a legal provision for

the poor; formed institutions for instructing the ignorant; purified the stream of justice, erected the throne of mercy. "These, O Jesus, are the triumphs and the trophies of thy gospel, and which of thine enemies, Paganism, Islamism, or infidelity, *has* done, or *could* do, the like?"

Even the avowed and inveterate opponents of the Gospel, have been reluctantly compelled to acknowledge, in this view, its excellence. Voltaire says expressly, "that religion is necessary in every community; the laws are a curb upon open crimes, and religion on those that are private." "No religion," says Bolingbroke, "ever appeared in the world, whose natural tendency was so much directed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind, as the Christian. The Gospel of Christ is one continued lesson of the strictest morality, of justice, benevolence, and universal charity. Supposing christianity to be a human invention it is the most amiable and useful invention that ever was imposed upon mankind for their good." Hume acknowledges, that "disbelief in futurity, loosens in a great measure the ties of morality, and may be supposed, for that reason, pernicious to the peace of civil society." Rousseau confesses, "that if all were perfect christians, individuals would do their duty, the people would be obedient to the laws, the chiefs just, the magistrates incorrupt, the soldiers would despise death, and there would be neither vanity nor luxury in such a state." Gibbon admits, "that the gospel discouraged suicide, advanced erudition, checked oppression, promoted the manumission of slaves, and softened the ferocity of barbarous nations; that fierce nations received at the same time

lessons of faith and humanity, and that even in the most corrupt state of Christianity, the barbarians learnt justice from the law, and mercy from the gospel."*

And yet with such concessions, and after having paid such a tribute of praise to the excellence of Christianity, these miserable men have been so vile and perverse as to conspire for her destruction.

Thus has it been most demonstrably proved, that godliness exerts a powerful and favourable influence over the temporal interests of mankind. Neglect it, my children, and you know not what awaits you, either in this world or in that which is to come. Decent, and sober, and steady, although not pious, you may fancy yourselves far enough removed from the probability of that wretchedness which vice brings with it. But, ah! in some unguarded moment, temptation may be successful to lead you astray; one vice makes way for another; and the dreadful progress described in the chapter on the deceitfulness of the heart, may be realized by you. Neglect religion, and you will *certainly* be ruined for the world to come, and *may be* for the life that now is. Vice certainly brings hell in its train, and oftentimes a dreadful earnest of its future torments, in present poverty, disease, and misery.

I reflect with unutterable grief, as I now write, upon many young men, who were entering life with the greatest advantages and the brightest prospects, whom, to use a common expression, fortune favoured with her brightest smiles; but

* See an interesting work, by Dr. Ryan, entitled, "The History of the Effects of Religion on Mankind, in Countries Ancient and Modern, Barbarous and Civilized." I very particularly recommend the perusal of this volume to all young persons who can procure it.

alas! they would not be happy and respectable, for taking to the ways of sin, they dashed all the hopes of their friends, and wantonly threw away the opportunities which a kind providence had put within their reach. They went first to the theatre, then to the brothel, then to the tavern. They became dissipated, extravagant, idle. Unhappy youth! I know what they might have been, respectable tradesmen, prosperous merchants, honourable members of society: I know what they are: bloated rakes, discarded partners, uncertificated bankrupts, miserable vagrants, a burthen to their friends, a nuisance to the community, and a torment to themselves.

Seek religion then; for, as Solomon says in a passage quoted in a former chapter, "She is more precious than rubies: and all things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her; Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Exalt her and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her."

CHAPTER XIII.

On the choice of companions.

Man was made for society, and society is thought to be essential to his happiness. Adam did but half enjoy the lovely and untainted scenes of Eden, while there was no rational companion, to whom he could impart the raptures of his soul, and Paradise was incomplete till God gave him a friend. How much more might it be expected, that now, when the human

bosom is bereft of its innocence, man should look out of himself for happiness, and endeavour to find it in society. Young people especially, are anxious to form associations of this kind, and are in imminent danger of choosing companions that will do them no good. The design of the present chapter is to put you, my children, on your guard against this evil, and to assist you in the selection of those friends with whom you take daily counsel. This subject has been already adverted to, but it is of sufficient importance to occupy a separate chapter.

1. It becomes you very seriously to reflect on the influence which your companions, of whatever kind they are, will certainly have in the formation of your character.

"We are all," says Mr. Locke, "a kind of camelions, that take a tincture from the objects which surround us." A still wiser man has told us, that "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." Hence he cautions us; "make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man thou shalt not go; lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul." These admonitions are founded on the general principle, that the example of our companions will exert a plastic influence in the formation of our own character, slow and silent, perhaps, but irresistible and successful: and this influence will be in proportion to the love and esteem we cherish for them. All nations and all ages have confessed the truth of this sentiment. The example of a beloved companion is omnipotent, more especially if he be a sinful one, because a bad model finds in the depravity of

our nature something that prepares it to receive the impression. One evil companion will undo in a month, all that parents and teachers have been labouring for years to accomplish. Here then pause, and consider that the character of your associates will, in all probability, be your own. If you do not *carry* to them a similarity of taste, you will be sure to *acquire* it; "for how can two walk together except they be agreed?"

2. Let me now set before you the dangers to be apprehended from *bad* company.

By bad company I mean all those who are destitute of the fear of God; not only the infidel, the profligate, the profane, but those who are living in *the visible neglect of religion.* Now these are not fit companions for you. They may be respectable and genteel as to their rank in life; they may be graceful and insinuating in their manners; they may be persons of fine taste, and cultivated understandings; of facetious humour, and polished wit; but these things, if connected with irreligious habits, only make them the more alarmingly and successfully dangerous. They are like the fair speech, and lovely form, and glowing colours, which the serpent assumed when he attacked and destroyed the innocence of Eve. Look through these meretricious ornaments, pierce this dazzling exterior, and recognize the substance, the fang and the venom of the wily foe. The more external accomplishments any one has, if he be without the fear of God, the greater is his power to do mischief; and remember, that when you have listened to his wiles, and feel the sharpness of his tooth, and the deadly ago-

ny of his venom, it will be no compensation, nor consolation, that you have looked on his many-tinted skin, and have been ruined by the fascination of his charms. The companions you are to avoid then, are those who are obviously living without the fear of God.

Consider the many dangers arising from such associates. You will soon outlive all sense of serious piety, and lose all the impressions you might have received from a religious education. These you cannot hope to preserve; you might as soon expect to guard the impressions you had traced with your finger on the sand, from the tide of the Atlantic ocean. Even they whose religious character has been formed for years, find it hard to preserve the spirituality of their mind in irreligious company. "Throw a blazing fire-brand into snow or rain," says Bolton, "and its brightness and heat will be quickly extinguished; so let the liveliest christian plunge himself into sinful company, and he will soon find the warmth of his zeal abated, and the tenderness of his conscience injured." How then can *you* expect to maintain a sense of religion, whose habits are scarcely formed, and whose character has yet so much of the tenderness and suppleness of youth? Do consider your proneness to imitate; your dread of singularity; your love of praise; your morbid sense of shame. Can you bear the sneer, the jest, the broad loud laugh! With none to defend you, none to join you in your reverence for piety, what are you to do single and alone?

In such company you lay yourselves open to temptation, and will probably be drawn into a great deal of guilt. In private and alone, the

force of temptation and the power of depravity are very great, but how much greater when aided by the example of intimate friends. As united fires burn the fiercer, and the concentrated virus of many persons thrown into the same room infected with the plague, renders the disease more malignant, so a sinful community improves and grows in impiety, and every member joins his brother's pollution to his own.

Nothing is so contagious as bad morals. Evil communications corrupt good manners. Multitudes have committed those sins without scruple in society, which they could not have contemplated alone without horror. It is difficult indeed to wade against the torrent of evil example, and in general, whatever is done by the party must be done by every individual of which it is composed.

In such company you will throw yourselves out of the way of repentance and reformation. The little relish you once had for devotional exercises will soon be lost. Your bible will fall into desuetude, the house of God will be neglected, and pious friends carefully shunned. Should an occasional revival of your serious feelings take place under a sermon, or the remonstrances of a friend, they will be immediately lulled again to repose, or banished from your bosom by the presence and conversation of an irreligious companion.

In many cases, evil society has destroyed for ever even the *temporal* interests of those who have frequented it. Habits of dissipation, folly, and extravagance have been acquired; character has been ruined, business neglected, poverty and misery entailed. But if this should not ensue, the influence of evil association will go to

ruin your *souls*, and sink you to perdition. A companion of fools shall be destroyed; their path is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death. Yes; if you connect yourselves with them, they will drag you into the vortex of their own ruin, as they sink in the gulf of perdition. Is there the companion on earth whose society you will seek or retain at this dreadful hazard? Is there one, for the sake of whose friendship you will be willing to walk with him to the bottomless pit? What though you could have the society of the first poets, philosophers, wits, and fashionables of the age, and yet were to lose your own souls, what would this profit you!! Will it soothe the agonies of your spirit in those regions of horrible despair, to remember what you enjoyed in the company of your gay companions on earth? Alas! alas! all that rendered your intercourse on earth delightful, will then come to a final end. There will be no opportunities granted you to gratify your sensual desires together; no delicious food, no intoxicating liquors; there are no amusing tales, no merry songs there; no feast of reason nor the flow of soul there; no coruscations of wit will enliven the gloom of hell: no gay fancy will brighten the darkness of eternal despair, no sallies of humour shall illumine the blackness of everlasting night; "but there shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth; the worm that never dies, and the fire that is never quenched."

What mind but His, who comprehends the universe in his survey, can conceive the multitudes that have been ruined for both worlds by the influence of bad company. Their names have been recorded on every roll of infamy,

and found in every memorial of guilt and wretchedness. The records of the workhouse and the hospital; of the jails and the hulks; of the gallows and the dissecting-room, would declare the mischief; and could we look into the prisons of lost souls, a crowd of miserable ghosts would meet our eye, who seem to utter in groans of despair, this sad confession, "We are the wretched victims of evil associations."

In the large and populous town where Providence has fixed my lot, I have had an extensive sphere of observation; and I give it as my decided conviction, and deliberate opinion *that improper associates are the most successful means which are employed by Satan for the ruin of men's souls.*

The advice then which I offer is this :—

1. Be not over anxious about society. Do not take up the opinion that *all* happiness centres in a friend. Many of you are blessed with a happy home, and an agreeable circle round your own fire-side.* Here seek your companions, in your parents, your brothers and sisters.

2. Determine to have *no* companion rather than an improper one. The one case is but a privation of what is pleasant, the other is the possession of a positive evil.

* Let me here address a word to parents. As you would not drive your children to seek improper companions abroad, seek to make them contented and happy at home. Render their own house pleasant to them, and they will rarely feel a desire to seek happiness in the houses of others. Be you their companions and friends, and they will not be anxious to seek foreign ones. As far as circumstances will admit, be much at home yourselves, and that will keep your children there. Spend what evenings you can in the bosom of your family. Point out to your children what books to peruse. Read *with* them and *to* them. Converse with them in a free and engaging manner. Do not be household tyrants; driving your children from your presence by severity, petulance, and ill humour: but conduct yourselves with that affection and affability, which shall render your return welcome to your family, and draw your children in a little crowd of smiling faces round you the moment you enter the room.

3. Maintain a dignified but not proud reserve. Do not be too frank and ingenuous. Be cautious of too hastily attaching yourselves as friends to others, or them to you. Be polite and kind to all, but communicative and familiar with few. Keep your hearts in abeyance, till your judgement has most carefully examined the characters of those who wish to be admitted to the circle of your acquaintance. Neither run nor jump into friendships, but walk towards them slowly and cautiously.

4. Always consult your parents about your companions, and be guided by their opinions. They have your interests at heart, and see further than you can.

5. Cultivate a taste for reading and mental improvement; this will render you independent of living society. Books will always furnish you with intelligent, useful, and elegant friends. No one can be dull who has access to the works of illustrious authors, and has a taste for reading. And after all, there are comparatively few, whose society will so richly reward us as this silent converse with the mighty dead.

6. Choose none for your intimate companions but those who are decidedly pious, or persons of very high moral worth. A scrupulous regard to all the duties of morality; a high reverence for the scriptures; a belief in their essential doctrines; a constant attendance on the means of grace, are the *lowest* qualifications which you should require in the character of an intimate friend.

Perhaps I shall be asked one or two questions on this subject, to which an answer ought to be returned. "If," say you, "I have formed an

acquaintance with a young friend before I had any serious impressions upon my mind, ought I now to quit his society, if he still remains destitute of any visible regard to religion?" First try, by every effort which affection can dictate, and prudence direct, to impress his mind with a sense of religion; if after a while your exertions should be unavailing, candidly tell him, that as you have taken different views of things, and acquired different tastes, to what you formerly possessed; and that as you have failed to bring him to your way of living, and can no longer accommodate your pursuits to his, conscience demands of you a separation from his society. Sir Matthew Hale, one of the most upright and able judges that ever sat upon the bench, was nearly ruined by his dissolute companions. When young, he had been very studious and sober; but the players happening to come to the town where he was studying, he became a witness of their performance, by which he was so captivated, that his mind lost its relish for study, and he addicted himself to dissipated company. When in the midst of his associates one day, it pleased God to visit one of them with sudden death. Sir Matthew was struck with horror and remorse. He retired and prayed, first for his friend, that if the vital spark were not fled, he might be restored; and then for himself, that he might never more be found in such places and company as would render him unfit to meet death. From that day he quitted all his wicked companions, walked no more in the way of sinners, but devoted himself to piety and literature.

I shall be asked again probably, "What am I to do, if I can find in my situation no individual

of my own rank and circumstances in life, who is a partaker of true piety; ought I, in this case, to associate with those who are much below me, and who cannot be my companions in any thing but piety?" In reply to this I observe, that it is *character* which constitutes respectability, and not the adventitious circumstances of fortune or rank: and to conduct ourselves in any degree as if we were ashamed of the followers of Christ, because they are poor, is an offence against our divine Lord. To forsake prayer-meetings, benevolent institutions, Sunday schools, or places where the gospel is preached, merely because we find none there of sufficient fortune to associate with us; to treat our poorer brethren with cold neglect and haughty distance; to refuse to be seen speaking *with* them, and *to* them, as if they were beneath us; this is most manifestly wrong; for it is carrying the distinctions of the world into the church. Still, however, as religion was never intended to level these distinctions, it might not be adviseable to choose *bosom companions* from those who are far below us in worldly circumstances. Some inconvenience would arise from the practice, and it would occasion, in many cases, the ways of godliness to be spoken ill of.

Young persons of good habits should take great heed that they do not, by insensible degrees, become dangerous characters to each other. That social turn of mind, which is natural to men, and especially to young persons, may perhaps lead them to form themselves into little societies, particularly at the festive season of the year, to spend their evenings together. But let me entreat you to be cautious *how* you spend them. If your games and your cups take

up your time till you entrench on the night, and perhaps on the morning too, you will quickly corrupt each other. Farewell then to prayer, and every other religious exercise in secret. Farewell then to all my pleasing hopes of you, and to those hopes which your pious parents have entertained. You will then become examples and instances of all the evils I have so largely described. Plead not that these things are lawful in themselves; so are most of those in a certain degree which, by their abuse, prove destructive to men's souls and bodies. If you meet, let it be for rational and Christian conversation; and let prayer and other devotions have their frequent place among you; and if you say or think that a mixture of these will spoil the company, it is high time for you to stop your career, and call yourselves to an account; for it seems by such a thought, that you are lovers of pleasure much more than lovers of God. Some of those things may appear to have a tincture of severity, but consider whether I could have proved myself faithful to you, and to him in whose name I speak, if I had omitted the caution I have now been giving you. I shall only add, that, had I loved you less tenderly, I should have warned you more coldly of this dangerous and deadly snare.*

* See Dr. Doddridge's sermon, entitled "A Dissuasive from keeping bad company."

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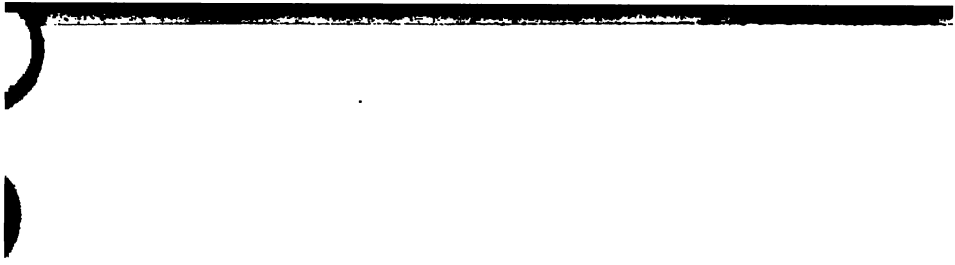

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